THE MASTER OF THE REBEL FIRST

THE MASTER
OF
THE REBEL FIRST

THE

SCHOOL HOUSE

LIBRARY

NOT OUT! A Story of School Life
KENT CARR

TWO BARCHESTER BOYS
K. M. EADY

FALL IN! A Public School Story
GUNBY HADATH

FOLLOW UP! A Story of Harrow School
A. D. FOX

THE MASTER OF THE REBEL FIRST
J. HOWARD BROWN

THE BOYS OF REDCLIFF
WALTER RHOADES

LONDON
S. W. PARTRIDGE & CO. LTD

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2019 with funding from
Kahle/Austin Foundation

https://archive.org/details/masterofrebelfir0000unse

"HE STRUGGLED VIOLENTLY TO GET FREE."

[*p.* 151.

THE MASTER
OF
THE REBEL FIRST

A STORY OF A PUBLIC SCHOOL

BY

J. HOWARD BROWN

AUTHOR OF
"THE WHITEDOWN CHUMS"
"TUBBY; OR, RIGHT ABOUT FACE"
ETC.

Publishers
PARTRIDGE
London.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	The Rebel First	7
II.	Enter Paul Parrett	15
III.	Polson	36
IV.	Jiu-Jitsu	43
V.	Paul Parrett in another Light	52
VI.	A Trap for a Parrot	60
VII.	More Jiu-Jitsu	81
VIII.	Polson's Difficulties	87
IX.	Polson's Auction	100
X.	A Punishment that fitted the Crime	106
XI.	The St. Anne's Match	116
XII.	Miss Taylor's Wedding Presents	134
XIII.	The Burglars	146
XIV.	Mr. Parrett as Amateur Detective	155
XV.	Mr. Parrett tackles Polson	172
XVI.	The Wedding, and other Events	178
XVII.	Briggs and Blencher	189
XVIII.	The Dormitory Master of Arts	210
XIX.	Polson becomes a D.Litt.	225

CHAPTER		PAGE
XX.	The Worst Kind of Lie . . .	244
XXI.	Polson's Plan of Campaign . .	255
XXII.	The Governors' Meeting . . .	270
XXIII.	Polson Found Out	280
XXIV.	Polson a Cripple, but Healed .	301

THE MASTER OF THE REBEL FIRST

CHAPTER I

THE REBEL FIRST

WHEN this story opens the boys in the lowest class of the A. I. and I. School had, in a very special way, proved themselves veritable imps. They had had, in succession, two form masters who had been quite unable to manage them.

The first had rejoiced in the name of Punshon, and had, of course, at once been christened "Punch." The First Form had soon found that he had not been intended by Providence to teach or manage boys, and they had given him a terrible time. The tone which some of them chose to adopt in answering questions in class was that with which

we become very familiar in some seaside resorts, the tone of the old, but ever young Punch, varied, I am sorry to say, with an occasional "Judy! Judy! Judy!" delivered in the orthodox way by some young reprobate with his head under the desk.

Mr. Punshon had, unfortunately, some strange mannerisms which did not help him in managing his class. He had a habit of shooting out his tongue, very much like a snake, touching the tip of it with his finger, and then pointing to some boy whom he intended to rebuke or exhort. Needless to say, this peculiar habit caused great amusement to his little charges, and, occasionally, a whole form of them, rising like one man, and looking at their master with solemn gaze, would, all together, and taking their time from the right, shoot out their tongue, touch the tip with their finger, and point sadly and reproachfully at their helpless and hapless master. Then they would sit down as solemnly as they had risen, leaving him to make what he could of their strange proceeding. Punishment made no difference to them. Many of them spent nearly all their play-time in detention and

writing lines, but obey and behave themselves they either would not, or could not. Their master was altogether lacking in the power which wins boys' respect, or at any rate, their obedience.

One term of insubordination and chaos passed, and then Mr. Punshon left, and was followed by a gentleman named Lamb. As befitted his name he was mild and meek in character, and ought, by right, to have inherited the earth, but alas! such is the injustice of the wicked world of boys, he only inherited a very full portion of his predecessor's unhappy fortune—he was unmercifully teased and baited. "Preparation" in his house, when he was in charge, was for the small boys no preparation at all. As soon as books were opened, and some of the elder boys, squaring their elbows, were settling down to learn their tasks for the morrow, some boy at the end of the room would emit a feeble and plaintive "Baa!" in the voice of a tiny lost lamb. No sooner had Mr. Lamb trotted off down the room to discover the offender, than an answering "Baa!" would be heard from the other end, this time loud and full, like the cry of a mother sheep anxiously seeking its little one. Then, for

five minutes the air would resound with "baas," baas little and baas big, baas bass, tenor, alto, and treble, until any one standing outside the door would have thought that a flock, by mistake, had strayed from their fold and sought shelter among the desks and forms of the school-room. Mr. Lamb would, meanwhile, run, perspiring, up and down the room, cautioning this boy, shaking that one, setting another on the form, but all to no purpose; the baas would continue until the sport grew stale, or some bigger boy, taking compassion on the unhappy master, would use his influence to stop them. Then "preparation" would go on in a sort of way for a few minutes, and Mr. Lamb would sit down and open a book, hoping to enjoy a period of peace.

"Snap! snap! snap!" Mr. Lamb looks up. A boy is standing, snapping his fingers.

"Well, what is it?"

The boy holds out a geography and an atlas, and in an appealing voice says, "Sir, would you kindly tell me where to find Baaaaaabylon?" The first syllable of the last word is uttered as though he were an old ram troubled by a complication of asthma and insanity.

Mr. Lamb deals with him more or less suitably, and sits down again, only after a few minutes to be asked another question, which necessitates the utterance of the syllable *ba* in some new and ingenious way.

In a few more minutes music is heard under one of the windows, which has purposely been left open. It is the product of a tin whistle and a male quartette. Whilst Mr. Lamb has been settling his various difficulties five boys have stolen from the room, and are now giving a subdued but sufficiently spirited rendering of "Mary had a little lamb." They wish to be heard by Mr. Lamb, but not by the Doctor. Mr. Lamb hastens over to the window, but the serenading party moves to another and continues its performance. Presently they come to the chorus, "Baa, baa, baa, baa-a; Baa, baa, baa, *baa!*" and are joined by several inside the room. Mr. Lamb looks round in desperation, and, at last, rushes from the room to capture the offenders. They are warned of his approach by friends inside the school-room, and dodge him, and by the time he returns are most industriously preparing their lessons for the morrow.

Mr. Lamb and the Doctor bore this sort of thing for a term, and then the former left, and the latter began to wonder whether there was a master alive who could manage the little wretches in the First Form.

Here, perhaps, I ought to tell you something about the A. I. and I. School. An eccentric old gentleman, who had for many years knocked about India and the Colonies, had at last come home, and settled in Downshire. Here, though reported to be well off, he had so pinched and scraped that he had become known throughout the countryside as a stingy old miser. At his death it was found that he had saved and invested a very large sum of money, all of which he had left for the foundation and endowment of a school, which was to be run on lines peculiarly his own. The men to whom he had entrusted the carrying out of his scheme found the provisions of his will quite impracticable, and, calling in the aid of the law, had got the terms of the trust so changed as to enable them to found and run a school on good modern lines.

One condition, however, remained unchanged, and that was that the school was only for boys whose parents had lived a

certain number of years in India or one of the Colonies, and who had done good work in some way for the Empire. To such boys the school offered exceptional advantages, and it always had its full complement of one hundred and fifty boarders. Boys were to be found in it whose parents were living at the ends of the earth, if in these days of quick and easy travel the earth can be said to have any ends.

Among the boys were the sons of Indian Civil servants, tea- and coffee-planters, engineers, missionaries, merchants, traders, farmers, police, army officers, college professors, school-teachers, rail, road, and bridge-builders, and others who had in some real way served the Empire.

Some, the Indian boys especially, were at first inclined to be a little stiff and superior, but that sort of thing could not live in the free atmosphere of the school, and all very soon found their own proper level.

The school was called, according to one of the provisions in its founder's will, by the rather absurd name of "The Anglo-Indian and Imperial School," but the boys were known throughout the neighbourhood as the

Anglo-Indian imps, or more concisely, as the Imps. The name was not unsuitable to a good many of the youngsters in the school, but the First Form especially had done their utmost to live up to the title, and in the idea of all competent judges, they had succeeded—well!

CHAPTER II

ENTER PAUL PARRETT

AFTER Mr. Lamb had gone, the School Governors looked round carefully, and at last engaged the services of a youth not much over twenty, but with excellent testimonials as to great ability and strength of character.

He had been a student at an important London school, had done well, and had obtained a good scholarship at the end of his school course. He had gone to Oxford for a short time, but then his father had died, and he had had to support his widowed mother. He had left Oxford, coached private pupils, and worked for the London University Examinations. He had lately obtained his degree with high honours.

This young man had many qualities which well fitted him to teach boys, but he was as unfortunate as his two predecessors in his

name. His surname was Parrett, and his misguided parents had, in an evil hour, added thereto the Christian name of Paul, not foreseeing that thoughtless and unfeeling boys would inevitably call him Poll Parrot, Pretty Poll, Polly, or Molly, according to inclination and taste. Then he was young, as we have seen, and his hairless face looked boyish and gentle, but an occasional glint in the grey-blue eye showed that behind the gentle and quiet exterior there were reserves of strength and determination. Much study had made him rather pale and thin, but by nature he was wiry and active, and even when studying hardest had been wise enough to give at least an hour a day to Sandow and other exercises, and lately had acquired from a Japanese youth, who had been one of his private pupils, a very considerable knowledge of the Japanese system of wrestling, called Jiu-jitsu.

Paul Parrett's father had been a good Christian man, and before his death had won his son for earnest and believing service of Christ, and no boy will ever be the worse for choosing that service, the best service in the world.

The night before leaving home he had been

talking to his mother, and she had said, "Don't be hard on the laddies, Paul; remember that you were one yourself not long ago."

"Hard on the laddies! I like that. They are more likely to be hard on me! I have had a letter from Jarvis, one of my old school chums. He knows the A. I. and I., and he says the boys I shall have to teach are the most mischievous little animals living. They nearly drove their last two masters crazy. A hopeful prospect for me!"

His mother's eyes twinkled. "I don't think they will drive you crazy, Paul; you're not built that way. But don't forget that the boys are not mere mischievous little animals. They have their own little lives to live, and their own little souls to save, and it's for you teachers to help them. Go into this matter with prayer, Paul, and try to help the laddies, especially to give a hand to those who are down."

Her son put his hands on his mother's shoulders and kissed her. "I'll try not to forget, mother; but boys *are* mischievous little animals, whatever else they may be, and it's not easy to help them in the higher

things; and I am afraid it will be particularly hard with this lot."

"Just so, Paul; and that's why you will need prayer all the more. No work is worth doing unless in it you can exert some influence for God. Follow your father's example; I never knew any one who more constantly than he helped others in the higher things, and his life was a life of prayer."

On the morning that Paul began his duties at school, Dr. Taylor went with him into his first class, and introduced him to his scholars, and at the same time took the opportunity of adding a word of exhortation and warning to them. They listened very demurely, and after having seen the new teacher and his class settle to work, the Doctor left to attend to his many other duties. Master and boys took stock of one another. Paul was not at all discouraged by the look of his class. They were on the whole a fine, healthy set of boys. There was mischief, writ large, on many of the demure faces before him, but nothing of evil or vice. It struck him that during the first hour they were preternaturally quiet and attentive, and he began to wonder how long it could last. During the second hour he had another class. There was

an interval of ten minutes between the second and third hours. At the end of the ten minutes, Mr. Parrett, who had been in the masters' sitting-room, found no one present in his class. He waited for two or three minutes and then set forth to explore.

Meanwhile, the First Form had been very busy. Immediately after the second hour they had all gone to their lavatory and locked themselves in. Then discussion had waxed very warm, whether they should do "it" or not. Some, who were better judges of character, had advised that they should not. One of these, a youngster named Mackenzie, had voiced their feelings when he had said, "I say, you fellows, we can't go on with this one as we did with poor Punch and Baa-lamb. His name is as rum as theirs, but after all parrots can peck, and I don't like the look of this one's eye. I think we had better not try it."

"Oh, get out!" shouted a lively, happy-go-lucky young rascal named Bald. "Of course we'll try it; what rubbish Mac talks about Polly's eye. To me he looks almost as meek and mild as Baa-lamb, and it will wake him up a bit and encourage him."

Discussion ran high for a minute or two,

but there was no time to waste, and it was soon decided, though with continued protests from some, to go on with "it."

The consequence was that, just as Mr. Parrett left his class-room, he was met by his class, coming to their lessons, but what a change in their appearance! They had heard of his arrival on the previous day. When they came to know his name they had put their heads and their pennies together, and two of them had gone into Downton, and had bought some cardboard, some glue, and some dry paint, green and red. Then, instructed by Bald, who was a genius in the invention of all kinds of mischief, each one of them had cut out of the cardboard three different parts, which, when stuck together with glue, formed a huge parrot's beak. They had blackened these with ink, and had fixed them on with string, tied behind their head. Regardless of after consequences, they had sprinkled the paint-dust on their heads and daubed it on their cheeks, and had made their hair stand straight on end. Then they had turned their coats inside out and made their way towards their class-room. Thus they had done "it," and "it" had a sufficiently astonishing result.

For a moment Mr. Parrett stood amazed at the sight before him. The boys walked two and two, each couple consisting of one red and one green-headed cockatoo. They were stalking solemnly along, with head high in air, stomach thrown forward, and toes turned out in a most absurd manner. Mr. Parrett stood irresolute for a moment, and then, throwing the class-room door wide open, he said genially, "Walk in, walk in, boys. I hardly knew you at first, but I suppose you are my class."

"We are," said one sepulchral voice, and then the boys seemingly took no further notice of him, but, marching in two by two, took their seats in due order and succession—red, green, red, green—and then waited for further developments. When they were all seated Mr. Parrett followed, shut the door quietly and carefully, and stood surveying the class with a quizzical smile, looking just a little cooler than a cucumber.

"You're a little late, boys," he said after a moment or two, glancing at his watch; "just three minutes and a quarter, in fact; but I suppose I must excuse you, as this elaborate pageant must have cost you much trouble and time. It's rather neat, and I should think

inexpensive; but some of your nose ornaments are not quite straight. Allow me." He put one boy's beak straight, and stepped back to look at the result. "May I ask what you are supposed to represent? Is it history or natural history?"

"We—are—Poll—Parrots," said Bald, in a rather uncertain voice; it rather looked as if this cool young fellow was laughing at them.

Paul stopped and carefully brushed some chalk from his coat-sleeve. "Parrots! You look more like cockatoos or toucans! Poll Parrots? What a funny coincidence! My name happens to be Paul Parrett, you know, and when I was at school the boys used to call me Poll—very rude of them, wasn't it?" Mr. Parrett laughed genially, and put his head on one side to get the full effect of Bald's disguise. The boys looked at one another as well as they could for their beaks; they did not expect their master to take things quite like this, and they began to realize that they must appear rather foolish. There was rather a long, and for them an uncomfortable pause, for they did not know how to proceed.

Paul at last broke the silence. "Is that really all you're going to do?" he asked;

"if so, I am rather disappointed. Such elaborate preparations deserve a more exciting finish. But if that's all we'll go on with work."

Bald, who was sitting in the front seat, began to undo his beak. "I've had enough of this," he muttered to the boy next him.

Mr. Parrett overheard him. "I've not," he said; "on the contrary, I'm just beginning to enjoy it. Leave your beak alone, sir." The last words were spoken in a tone which had suddenly changed from polite banter to stern command. Bald continued to fumble with the string for a moment, but a very sharp rap on the knuckles with a ruler caused him to cry out and wring his hands.

"I said, 'Leave your beak alone, sir,' and if you're wise you'll obey me."

Bald glanced up. This was neither Mr. Lamb nor Mr. Punshon standing over him. It was rather a white face into which he looked, but there was something in it of cool determination and will, Bald hardly knew what, that must be obeyed. His eyes and hands dropped, and he sat still. The leader, and with him the class, was conquered.

"Now," said Mr. Parrett, "no boy will

touch his beak, or I'll know the reason why."

He paused and looked round the class, but no boy did touch his beak, none liked the look in Mr. Parrett's eye.

"Very well, now we'll go on with the work, beaks, paint, and all, please. And it has just struck me that, instead of the ordinary lesson, I'll give you one, illustrated, on parrots." He turned to the blackboard with the chalk in his hand. "Then we can take the ordinary lesson in play-time, from half-past twelve to half-past one," he continued.

There was incipient rebellion, and a murmur of protest.

Mr. Parrett swung round on one heel. "Silence!" He hardly raised his voice, but the word seemed to cut the boys like a knife. Surely, too, he had grown several inches in height, and his eyes flashed like a red-hot coal! Mr. Parrett paused for a full half minute and glared at the boys, and they all sat mum—silence it was! They had caught a Tartar; they had gone out like little dogs to hunt a hare, or chivy a lamb, and had suddenly come face to face with a wild boar from the forest.

Mr. Parrett resumed his ordinary pleasant

tone, and went on with his lesson—illustrated—on parrots. He discoursed on the shape of the parrot's beak, criticized some of the beaks before him, and showed their deviation from the normal. He explained how well fitted the parrot's beak was for the purposes of nature, and how the upper part of it was movable, in order to avoid sudden strains or jars. Then he described to them a few of the five hundred different kinds of parrots, and was sorry he could not tell them just to which species they belonged. He told, and I am afraid, invented, funny stories about birds he had known, and, altogether, gave the boys what, in other circumstances, would have been a most interesting and pleasant lesson.

In the middle of it there was a knock at the door.

"Come in," shouted Mr. Parrett. In walked the Doctor again, as the foolish boys might have known he would, sometime or other in the morning. He held up his hands in amazement, and was going to exclaim, but an expressive glance from Mr. Parrett kept him silent, waiting for an explanation of the scene before him.

"My class, sir," Mr. Parrett began, "prepared a natural history pageant for me—I

suppose as a pleasant little surprise. As their get-up is not altogether true to nature I am giving them a lesson—illustrated—on parrots. I propose to take their proper lesson from half-past twelve to half-past one, and then, with your permission, I should like to bring them in to dinner just as they are. It is a pity that the rest of the school should lose such a pageant as this."

The boys looked at the Doctor anxiously; surely he would not agree to such a crack-brained proposal as this. But the Doctor saw that Mr. Parrett knew his own business, and said at once, as if it were quite a matter of course, "Oh, certainly, Mr. Parrett, we shall all be pleased to see them; I am glad you thought of it." Then, turning to the boys, he continued, "Each boy in this class will come into dinner exactly as he is, beak, paint, and all; no change is to be made. Any boy who attempts to make any change in his appearance will hear of it." The Doctor gave a significant nod and walked out of the room.

As soon as the door was shut behind him his face expanded into a sunny and satisfied smile. "He'll do, he'll do," he said to himself; "he's got the power to manage boys."

When the bell went at half-past twelve the

other boys went past the door into the playground, but the First Form turned to their proper lesson. Mr. Parrett had them in hand, and kept them so. He allowed no nonsense, no whispering, but ruled them with a rod of iron, until the first bell rang for dinner. Then he looked at his watch and said, "I must go and wash for dinner, but no boy will stir from his place whilst I am away. You may talk, but if either of you makes the slightest change in his appearance you have the Doctor's assurance—and mine—that you will hear of it."

As soon as he had gone a babel arose.

Mackenzie said to Bald, who was next to him, looking very crestfallen, if a boy with a parrot's beak, and green hair sticking straight up on end, could look crestfallen, "There, you idiot, Bald, I told you not to try it; I knew he wasn't like Baa-lamb, and when it came to the push you were the first to cave in."

Bald sat silent; he knew that he had not appeared to much advantage.

"And now," continued Mackenzie, "we've got to go in to dinner looking like a lot of red and green fools, and we'll never hear the end of it."

"Don't let's go," said another boy.

"What's the good of that," said Mackenzie; "we've got to deal now not only with Parrett, but with the Old Man" (such was the boys' irreverent name for the Doctor), "and if we don't go there'll be no end of a shine, and we shall get the worst of it in the end."

"Besides," said another boy, "if Parrett tells us to go, we'll go. We can't play the fool with him. He's no chicken of a parrot. Even if the Old Man were not in it he'd make us go, somehow or other."

Bald tore off his beak and looked at it revengefully, and then gave it a "bash" with his fist that knocked it all to one side. "Hang it all!" he exclaimed. "I wish I had never thought of this stupid trick." Just then a step was heard outside the door, and he put his beak on again very hurriedly. He was still fumbling with the string when Mr. Parrett came in.

"What are you doing, Bald?" he said; "not taking off your beak, I hope."

"No, sir; I am just fastening it on again," replied Bald.

"It's all on one side; what have you been doing to it? Take it off and put it right *at once*."

Bald took it off and put it right *at once*, and then tied it on again as meekly and mildly as the departed Mr. Lamb could have done.

"Stand!" ordered Mr. Parrett. The class stood.

"Get into couples, red and green." His order was obeyed.

"March!"

The other boys had already gone into the common dining-hall, where all met for dinner. They knew that something extraordinary was "up" in Mr. Parrett's class-room, but exactly what it was they had not found out. They were all seated when the Doctor said, "We will wait a minute or two for the First Form. They prepared for Mr. Parrett what he calls a 'pageant,' and he desires that you should all have the benefit of it as well as himself. When they come in you may laugh, if you like, but there is to be no disorder or unseemly noise."

The boys were all agog with expectation, when the door was thrown open and the First Form appeared, walking two and two, led by Bald and Mackenzie, though in their extraordinary get-up no one would have recognized them save by their clothes. They began

to file in two by two, and at the sight of them masters, boys, the Doctor's wife and his daughter, and even the trim, white-aproned maidservants went off into peals of laughter, though, thanks to the Doctor's precautionary words, there was no disorder.

Mr. Parrett's victims blushed red, even through their war-paint. Some tried to brazen the matter out, but they found this difficult, knowing as they did what a ridiculous figure they must cut. Some of them grinned sheepishly, but most of them hung their heads and got to their places as soon as possible. Mr. Parrett brought up the rear, quite grave and unconcerned. He was seemingly unconscious that anything out of the common was going on. As he went to his place there was another laugh, but this time of appreciation. The boys enjoyed his perfect sang-froid in the moment of his victory over the rebel First. He took his place at the head of the First Form table, grace was said, and the meal began.

The red and green parrots did not find dinner an easy meal. Their master sat and chatted to them quite genially and pleasantly, but did not get many replies from those he addressed. They found that their enormous

and ridiculous beaks made eating a difficult task, and were conscious that their efforts in that line were being much appreciated by the grinning boys at the other tables. Most of them ate very frugally and kept their eyes fastened on their plates, and were sincerely glad when dinner was over. Just before the Doctor gave the sign for the boys to file out of the dining-hall he said, "Our young friends, the red and green parrots, will please remain after the other boys have gone. We thank them for the amusement they have given us, although I am afraid with some of them it has been at the expense of a meal. Such self-sacrifice, I am sure, will fill their hearts with a glow as warm and generous as that on their faces and heads." Again there was a laugh, and the First Form looked more like little sheep than parrots. The other boys left the dining-hall, and Dr., Mrs., and Miss Taylor came over to the table of the unhappy First. Their cup of bitterness was now full. Mr. Parrett stood up when the ladies approached, and Miss Taylor said to him, "What interesting boys yours are, Mr. Parrett; and I should add, ingenious. But what is the exact meaning of all this?"

"Oh, you see, Miss Taylor," said Mr.

Parrett in the hearing of all, smiling and quite cheerful, "my name is Paul Parrett, very easily changed, of course, into Poll Parrot, and I believe this little 'pageant' was meant to cover me with confusion. Unfortunately for my pupils, I have got so used to wretched puns on my name that they cease to excite any emotion in my breast, and so their little plan did not come off quite so successfully as they hoped."

Miss Taylor laughed, and said, "Evidently not."

Mrs. Taylor then took up the running. "You foolish little fellows," she said; "how do you think that you are going to get all that stuff out of your hair? You will none of you be fit to look at for a week. Such an absurd spectacle I have never seen."

"No, indeed," chimed in Dr. Taylor; "and you will not see it again, my dear, if I can help it. I am just thinking what punishment is likely to keep these boys from any further nonsense of this kind."

"I hope, sir," said Mr. Parrett, "that you will not punish them any further. I think I can promise you that they will not try anything quite like this again. I would ask as a favour that you will now forgive

them, and allow them and me to make a fresh start together."

Miss Taylor added her voice to Mr. Parrett's, "Though it is rather difficult to judge of their feelings from their faces, father, still, I think they have had enough. They did not seem to enjoy their dinner very much."

Here Bald, who had not felt very happy about the part he had had in all this, spoke up. "This is all my fault, sir. I proposed this trick, and got the others to carry it out, some of them against their will. If any one is to be punished it ought to be me, and me alone."

"Well, well," said Dr. Taylor, "that's good as far as it goes, but is there anything further you wish to say?"

"Yes, sir," chimed in Mackenzie. "I want to say this: Mr. Parrett has beaten us fairly and squarely, and has given us a very bad time. We've had enough, and I think I can speak for the rest when I say that we are not likely to try anything like this again."

"No," replied the Doctor grimly, "you had better not. I warn you boys that I have come to the end of my tether with you. All this sort of thing *must* stop. However, this time, as Mr. Parrett wishes it, I will do and

say no more. Be off with you, and get yourselves clean. Throw away those ridiculous beaks, and in some practical way show your gratitude to Mr. Parrett for getting you off a very severe punishment."

The boys got out of the room as quickly as they could, only to be collared by a crowd, who were lying in wait for them. They were marched off to the school-room, and had to tell their experiences. Then they were allowed to spend a full hour trying to get rid of their war-paint, and while they did so boys laughed and jeered and made merry at their expense. When they had to go to Mr. Parrett's class-room for another hour in the afternoon they were very quiet, not to say lamb-like, in behaviour. Mr. Parrett did not attempt to abuse his victory, and by the end of the hour he and his class were on excellent terms with one another.

"Well," said Bald to Mackenzie, as they went along the passage after school was over, "it's really quite a treat to have some one who can bully-rag and manage us. I was really beginning to get a bit weary of the Punch, Baa-lamb business. What sickly sheep they were! But Parrett is a man, and seems about as straight as you can make 'em."

"Yes," said Mackenzie, "he is. But the only nuisance is that we shall have to work like niggers now. Parrett will be a regular slave-driver, I can see. And the worst of it is that under Punch and Baa-lamb I have quite got out of the way of work."

Bald laughed loud and hilariously. "Got out of the way of work? When were you ever in it? I can't remember."

Mackenzie gave Bald a punch and ran off, and the latter, with a joyous whoop, pursued, and playfully kicked him downstairs into the playground. Boys' spirits are very elastic.

CHAPTER III

POLSON

POLSON was the son of a Johannesburg gold magnate, and what service his father had ever rendered to the Empire it would have been difficult to say. He had, however, managed, somehow or other, to get his son into the school (wealthy men can manage almost anything), and now Polson Junior was about fifteen years of age, and in the Fourth Form.

He was naturally a clever boy, but was lazy both in the class-room and the playing field. He had a generous allowance of pocket-money, and so had a following of the baser sort among the boys. He liked to be mischievous and cheeky to the masters when he thought that he could be so with impunity. He was spiteful and revengeful, and was far from honourable, either in disposition, or in his dealings with others.

We left Bald chasing Mackenzie downstairs. As they emerged from the porch into the playground, Bald collided with Polson and sent him staggering.

"Sorry," said Bald, grinning, as he also staggered back; but Polson, when he had recovered himself, gave him a good cuff on the head.

"You clumsy little duffer!" he said; "why don't you look where you're going?"

"Oh, all right, Cornflour!" said Bald, getting out of arm's reach; "you needn't get into such a wax. Besides, why don't you look where you're standing?"

Polson made for him, but Bald darted away. Polson could, however, run the faster, as he was older and bigger, and in spite of Bald's clever dodging and doubling, he was just on the point of being caught, when Mackenzie ran in, caught Polson by the back of his coat, and gave him such a sudden swing that Bald was able again to get quite out of reach.

Polson, in a rage, turned after Mackenzie, but was again checked, this time by Bald, who followed Mackenzie's former tactics. Polson, who was very bad-tempered, was, by this time, in a thundering rage, and went

after Bald, determined to catch and half kill him. Mackenzie again watched his chance, and darted in as before. This time, however, Polson was ready, stopped, and met him with a swinging blow on the side of the head, which sent him spinning to the ground, where he lay for a moment or two dazed and giddy. Bald had stopped and turned. Indignant at the cruel force of Polson's blow he cried out, "You vicious cad!" and rushed in on him, all fire and fight.

Polson was for a moment staggered by the smaller boy's onset, but then, stepping back, hit out viciously, and by a blow in the face knocked him over. Bald was on his feet again in a moment, and again rushed in, only to be met by another blow, delivered with Polson's whole strength. Bald partly warded it off, and Mackenzie was up, and joined in the attack. Polson was beginning to have a very warm time of it, but just then a voice, which Bald and Mackenzie had already learnt to know, said, "Stop that, boys; it's gone too far already." They immediately drew back, abashed.

Mr. Parrett had sauntered down into the playground, and had, from a little distance, been an amused spectator of the scene. When

the fighting began, however, he had hurried up, and now laid his hand firmly on Polson's shoulder.

Polson turned; he was not sorry for the interruption, for he did not relish the thought of a fight with two plucky and dogged youngsters like Mackenzie and Bald. Still, he was in a rage, and, almost snarling at Mr. Parrett, said, "I have only been giving those two cheeky youngsters from your class a lesson, sir."

Mr. Parrett looked at him steadily for a moment, and his eyes fell.

"I saw it all," said Mr. Parrett at last, "and feel very much like teaching you a lesson for losing your self-control like that, and also for your impudence. You seem to be a boy of remarkably nice disposition."

Polson turned away sulkily, and walked off with his hands in his pockets, after giving Bald and Mackenzie an angry scowl.

Mr. Parrett looked after him for a moment, and his fingers were itching to proceed to the "lesson," but he controlled himself, and turned to Bald and Mackenzie. "Nice sweet youth that. What is his name?"

"Polson, sir."

"In what form?"

"The Fourth."

"Well, in other circumstances I should have felt inclined to let you two youngsters finish it off with him, but, fortunately for him, perhaps, fighting is against the rules of the school; I suppose you forgot."

"Yes, sir."

"Well, no more of it. Meanwhile, you had better go, Bald, and put something on that eye, or to-morrow you'll be more beautifully coloured even than you were to-day."

Bald and Mackenzie hurried off into the house, glad to get off so easily, and Mr. Parrett followed more leisurely.

Meanwhile, two or three boys, who had been watching all this, followed Polson.

"Hallo, Cornflour!" said one, named Reynolds; "how are you going to show your gratitude to Parrett? Lucky for you that he came in when he did. Those two youngsters would have pounded you into a jelly, or pudding, or blancmange, or whatever it is they make of cornflour."

Polson turned angrily. "What!" he said; "like Poll's cheek to interfere when I was giving those two kids a licking."

"Giving them a licking! Ha, ha! if you were giving them a licking, then they were

giving you a chawing, gulping you down, in fact, like a lump of blancmange."

"Here, Reynolds, I'll hit you if you go on like that."

"Thanks, old man; so very obliging of you. Wouldn't give you so much trouble, though, for the world; so I'll stop. But I was asking you how you were going to show your gratitude to Parrett."

"Hang Parrett!"

"Oh, how unkind! Is that your gratitude?"

"Don't be funny. I wish you and your Parrett would get out."

"He seems to have riled you by his polite little lie about your 'nice disposition.'"

"Interfering young ass! He needn't think he's going to boss us big fellows, whatever he may do with his kids in the First Form!"

"But you know he's down in the routine to take the Fourth Form too."

"To take us!"

"Yes; the whole routine's changed, and he has us in several classes. They say he's a very smart chap."

"Good gracious! What's the Old Man after? Fancy a kid like that being put on to teach us!"

"I daresay he'll be able to teach even you a thing or two. He said he'd like to give you a lesson."

"He'd better not try it on. I mean to give *him* a lesson before I've done."

"*You'd* better not try it on; see how he did those First Form kids to-day."

"I'm not a First Form kid, and he won't do me so easy."

"No; you're only the Fourth Form goat. I forgot, sorry! Anyhow, you won't dare to teach Parrett a lesson, as you call it."

"I will."

"When?"

"Whenever you like."

"All right; the first time he takes prep."

"Right you are, I will."

CHAPTER IV

JIU-JITSU

POLSON'S opportunity soon came. Preparation was held in each of the three boarding-houses in which the boys lived, and the masters living in the different houses took it in turns to superintend.

Mr. Parrett was in the Doctor's house, and his turn to take preparation came soon after he arrived. Polson seemed to think that he would find an easy victim in him, for, being rather skilful with his fingers, he, before preparation, drew on the blackboard a spirited picture of a parrot, with the following inscription underneath: "Pretty Poll; scratch your poll, Polly." The Sixth and Fifth Forms were not expected to come to preparation, as they had small studies of their own, so there was no one to interfere with Polson's leaving the picture on the board when preparation began, although one or two ob-

jected to it, as going too far, even with a new master.

Presently Mr. Parrett came in. He was certainly nervous, but did his best not to show it, and the boys began work quietly, waiting for developments. He saw the picture on the board soon after he came in, but said nothing, as he was wondering how he should deal with the matter.

Presently he stopped before the board, and coolly examined it and its inscription.

"I suppose," he said quietly, seeking to keep a small tremble out of his voice, "this is meant for a welcome to me. May I ask who the able and polite artist is?"

There was a smile at this, and Polson said in an insolent tone, "I drew it."

"Oh, you did, did you? For what reason?"

"Oh, I was just giving some of the small boys an object lesson on parrots, and telling them what brainless birds they are, and how their heads are only of use for scratching." Polson drawled this out in a slow, insolent way, which was sufficiently annoying.

There was a titter at this, though some of

the better-disposed boys, who did not love Polson, cried out, " Shame ! "

" Silence, please ! " said Mr. Parrett, keeping his temper admirably, and then turning again to Polson, said, " Your name is Polson, isn't it ? "

Polson did not reply, but a small boy in the Second Form cried out mischievously, " Yes, sir ; his name is Peter Plantagenet Polson," and another said in a stage whisper, " Cornflour."

" Really, that's nearly as good a name as mine. You forget, Peter Plantagenet Polson, that people who live in glass houses should not throw stones. But, now, kindly step this way."

Polson did not attempt to move. In a trice Mr. Parrett was by his side. " I see you need an object lesson in obedience," he said.

Polson never knew quite how it happened, but, though he was well grown for his age, he suddenly found himself lifted clean out of his seat, and hurried along at a very undignified speed to a spot in front of the blackboard.

" Rub that out ! "

Polson remained sullenly still.

"Once more, rub that out," said Mr. Parrett.

Polson made no movement.

"For the last time, rub that out."

"Shan't," muttered Polson.

"All right, Peter Plantagenet Polson; I see I shall have to treat you as rude little boys are treated," and again Polson was hurried off to an empty desk, was arranged most artistically across it, held there as in a vice, helpless, and treated to a very liberal dose of Mr. Parrett's slipper. In fact, he received a smarter spanking than he had ever received even in the early days of childhood. When Mr. Parrett had quite done, he released Peter Plantagenet, who might have thought that it was all a bad dream, so sudden and unexpected had it been, save for a very hot tingling which convinced him that he was awake and that his experience had been most real.

"Now, sir," said Mr. Parrett quietly, "are you ready to rub that out?"

Polson was in a towering rage, and was about to break out into something violent, but he happened to catch Mr. Parrett's eye, and there was a glint there, so strong, so cold, so determined, that Polson, who was far from being a hero, felt that he had met his match,

and not knowing quite what might next happen if he refused, went sullenly up to the board and rubbed out the offending picture.

"Now take that chalk," said Mr. Parrett. "Quickly!" he added, as Polson hesitated.

Polson obeyed.

"Now begin well at the top of the board, and write: 'I,'" Polson wrote, "'have acted—like—a rude little boy'" (Polson again hesitated, but a vice-like grip on his arm made him go on), "'and I humbly apologize—to Mr. Parrett—comma—and to those whom I have disturbed—in their evening studies.' Thank you; now you may go back to your seat, and try to behave yourself more like a gentleman in future."

Then Mr. Parrett turned to the boys. "Now, boys," he said, "I do not want to give any one else any lessons in obedience or jiu-jitsu, but I want you all to understand that I will not have any nonsense during preparation, and that, somehow or other, if I give a boy an order, I will have him obey."

The boys, who had been very interested spectators of this scene, saw that the junior master meant what he said; and that he was not quite so mild as he at first sight appeared,

and beyond a few nudges, whispers, and grins, reminiscent of what had taken place, preparation passed off very quietly.

Polson was a boy with an evil temper, and also very vain, and the way in which he had been treated and held up to ridicule made him rage inwardly with helpless fury. He sat during preparation with a wicked scowl on his face, and though a book lay open before him, not one word did he read; his only thought was that somehow or other he would revenge himself on this master, who sat at his desk so quietly and coolly, or took an occasional stroll round the preparation room.

After preparation the boys were allowed half an hour for quiet games, reading, or talk, before supper and bed.

As soon as Mr. Parrett had left the room a crowd of boys gathered round the hapless and sullen Polson. He took no notice of them, but pretended to read a book.

"I say, you fellows," began one, "some parrots are not such brainless birds, after all."

"No; and when you try to scratch their polls they have a nasty habit of biting in a sudden and unexpected way."

"But it does seem a little unfair for a parrot to go in for jiu-jitsu *and* slippers."

"But, on the other hand, what a gentlemanly bird to give one of its slippers so generously and freely to dear Cornflour."

"Rather! And how well it fitted him! He might have been measured for it. Such a nice slipper, too, so warm and comfortable!"

"A *felt* slipper, eh?"

At this wretched pun a groan went up from the crowd of boys, and the perpetrator, Reynolds, was caught and made to feel his own slipper. When this business was satisfactorily finished, the boys returned to baiting Polson. Reynolds remarked quite impenitently, "What's up, Polson? You're as blue as a corn-flower."

"Oh, shut up, Reynolds, with your beastly puns!" answered another boy; "you'd be blue if you had had such a trying experience as Polson has to-night."

"There'd be a little red about me, I think."

Polson at last looked up in a black rage. "Get out, Reynolds," he shouted, "or I'll kick you out!"

"How kind! But don't you think you'd better learn some of Parrett's jiu-jitsu first?"

Polson got up and made a demonstration,

but that was all. He was no match for Reynolds, and knew it. He sat down again, and growled out, "Wait, and I'll pay Pretty Poll out!"

"Indeed! I'm sorry for Pretty Poll. What do you propose doing?"

"Oh, wait and see," said Polson mysteriously; as a matter of fact, he had no notion whatever of how he was going to do it.

"Well, I should strongly advise you to leave Poll alone. He's by no means such a fool as you evidently thought him; he's quite able to look after himself, and, if necessary, to make it even warmer for you than he did to-night."

"You mind your own business," said Polson; "he took me by surprise with his caddish tricks to-night, but I'll get even with him yet."

Reynolds laughed aloud, and, turning to the others, said, "Let's leave poor Cornflour alone; he's had a bad upset, and he doesn't know where he are, quite. When he's had time to think he'll be a sadder and a wiser youth."

They all turned away and left Polson to himself, and he sat and nursed his wrath, until his mind was full of black hate against

the master who had so unexpectedly turned the tables on him that night. He did not remember that he had been the aggressor, and that Mr. Parrett's action had only been a counter-attack in self-defence.

The time soon came for supper, and then the boys went quietly off to bed, without any of the impish tricks they ordinarily tried to play on new masters on their first "prep." night.

CHAPTER V

PAUL PARRETT IN ANOTHER LIGHT

MR. PARRETT was becoming more and more friendly with the boys. He made a point of joining them in their games, not only in cricket and football, but also in the games of the playground, such as "Bull, bull," "Sunday, Monday," "I spy, I," etc.

One day, as he was passing through the gymnasium, he heard a sob. He stopped to listen. Another sob. It came from a corner behind the vaulting-horse, which was covered with a gymnasium mat. He went and looked over. He saw a little lad sitting there on a form, which stood half-concealed against the wall. He recognized him as Fawcett, one of those in the First Form, who, a few days before, had been masquerading in beak and paint. He was only about nine years of age, and had an innocent little face, with curly

flaxen hair. He was, as a rule, a jolly, healthy, mischievous boy. But to-day the little face was tear-stained and pale.

"What's the matter, Fawcett?"

The only answer was that the little boy, touched by the note of kindness in the voice, bowed his face on his knees and burst into a fresh storm of sobs.

Mr. Parrett vaulted lightly over the horse, and sat down on the form by the boy. He saw that he was in some great trouble, and in a coaxing voice said, "Now, Fawcett, lad, what's the matter? Come, tell me."

Little Fawcett looked up into Mr. Parrett's face; the eyes looking down at him had no cold determination in them, but were full of kindness, and could certainly be trusted.

"My father's dead, sir."

"I'm so sorry. Would you like to tell me about it."

"My father was a missionary in India, sir, and Dr. Taylor heard two days ago that he had died. Mrs. Taylor told me all about it, and then gave me a letter from mother. Mrs. Taylor was so kind, and kept me in her house. But to-day I came down to lessons. I have tried to be brave, but something happened."

"What was it?"

"I must not tell, sir."

"Why not?"

"I am afraid it would be sneaking."

"Well, tell me what it was without mentioning names."

Mr. Parrett saw that it would help the lad to tell the story.

"After school I went down to the playground, and, as I did not feel like playing any games, I was standing by the aviary watching the pigeons, when Corn——I mean one of the boys came up to me and said he wanted me to go and field for him at cricket practice. I asked him to let me off, but he wouldn't. Then one of the other fellows came up and told him that my father was dead. 'Oh!' he said, 'he heard of that two or three days ago; it will do him good to come and fag at cricket.' But I still did not want to go, and so, after a bit, he got angry and smacked my head, and went off. It was not the smack, sir; but it seemed to bring all the thought of my father's death back, just as when I first heard it."

Mr. Parrett understood at once that the lad's heart had been sore for sympathy and love, and the brutal thoughtlessness of the

bigger boy had bruised it still further, and the little fellow had crept into a corner so as not to be seen crying. Mr. Parrett remembered his mother's words as to helping those who were in trouble, and he wondered how he could comfort this forlorn little fellow.

"Tell me all about your father. Never mind about my being a master, try to think I am your big brother."

For answer Fawcett put a letter into Mr. Parrett's hand. "Please read that, sir."

It was a letter from his mother, full of love and pity for her fatherless little son. It told him how his father had worked almost day and night in a famine-stricken district, and how, when he was quite weary and run down, a terrible fever had come, and how in a few days he was gone. Just before his death he had waked from a kind of stupor, and had said to his wife, "Don't cry, dear, I have just seen the Master, and I am going to Him. He will watch over us both until we meet again. I only wish my little son Harry were here, but tell him that he must meet me too. Tell him that my dying words and prayer are for him." Soon after he had passed peacefully away.

When he had finished reading Mr. Parrett said, with a little catch in his voice, "It was a brave and beautiful death, Fawcett."

"Yes, sir; but I did so want to see him again. I came from India about a year ago, and he and mother were hoping to be home in a year or so more. And poor mother will be so lonely and sorrowful."

"Yes, she will, but God will help her and comfort her. He is the God of the widow, you know, and I am sure He will give special peace to your mother, since she has left home and country to serve Him."

Mr. Parrett never found it easy to talk about religion, but here was a little fellow standing for the first time in the presence of death, and needing help and comfort. How could he help and comfort except from the teaching of Him who has shown us that death is but the dark gateway into the Father's Home?

Mr. Parrett took little Fawcett to his own room, they had tea together, and the master, with gentlest sympathy and in simple language, told his pupil all he had learnt about heaven from his Great Master.

From that day began a friendship between Mr. Parrett and his little pupil, which only

strengthened and deepened as the days went on.

Next day Mr. Parrett was again in the playground, and, turning the corner of the school building, came suddenly upon Polson again tormenting little Fawcett.

Polson had seen him in the playground reading again his precious letter, and had snatched it from him, not knowing—let us do him justice—that it was the letter telling him of his father's death, and perhaps forgetting, for the moment, the little fellow's sorrow.

"Give me my letter," said little Fawcett, in great distress; "you have no right to take it."

"Might is right, might is right," chanted Polson, holding the letter just out of Fawcett's reach. "How long will you fag at cricket if I give it back to you?"

"Give me my letter, *please* give it me; it's very private."

"Private, eh? What right has a kid like you with a private letter?" Polson pretended to read it, holding it in one hand, whilst with the other he held back the little fellow, who was trembling with excitement and fear lest Polson should really read it.

But judgment, sudden and sure, was descending upon Polson, and without any warning he received a cuff on the head which sent him staggering several paces. When he had come to a standstill he looked at his assailant, and found that it was Mr. Parrett, with his face ablaze with righteous anger.

"You cad, Polson! You know that this little fellow has lately received the saddest news, and yet you can't leave him alone. Give me that letter immediately."

Polson did not delay in handing it over.

"It's as I guessed, the very letter telling him of his father's death. You low cad!"

"I didn't know," muttered Polson.

"You knew enough. No right-minded boy, knowing what you know, would have anything but sympathy and pity for this poor little fellow."

"How was I to know that his father was dead?"

"Because you were told so yesterday. What? Yes, I *do* know. Clear out from here quickly, or I shan't be able to keep my hands off you. You're a cruel, heartless fellow, and deserve a good hiding."

Polson "cleared out" as quickly as his dignity would permit. He did not want any

more experience of Mr. Parrett's jiu-jitsu methods, but this little incident only made his anger against his master hotter, and he continued on the look-out for some way of revenging himself upon him.

Little Fawcett looked up into Mr. Parrett's face with silent gratitude, and was soon induced to join in a game, and thus to forget his trouble for a time.

CHAPTER VI

A TRAP FOR A PARROT

IT was two or three weeks after the events related in the last chapter, and Mr. Parrett had steadily improved his position among the boys. Polson had not dared, since his first painful experience in trying to bait Mr. Parrett, to do anything openly against him, but all that he could do, by persistent ill-speaking and sneers, he did, and there was a certain set of boys, who were a good deal under his influence, who still chose to consider Mr. Parrett a mollycoddle, and in fact liked to call him Molly, instead of the obvious " Poll," which was his ordinary nickname.

Polson had brooded long over the way in which he should take his revenge upon Mr. Parrett. He thought at last he had found a way.

Mr. Parrett was fond of long walks. On

half-holidays, as cricket had not yet begun in earnest, he often took two or three boys for a walk along the cliffs, and a scramble down them to the beach. After a bathe in a small sheltered cove, about four miles away, they would return by the same way to the school. In going and returning he had to pass a cottage in a lane. In this cottage lived a man named Scragg. He was a small market-gardener, and kept pigs and poultry. His garden was not very large, but well kept, and he seemed to be making money fast, for in the last five years he had been constantly renting fresh land. He was helped by a man and a boy, the former belonging to the neighbourhood, but the latter, like himself, a cockney.

Scragg was a peculiar character. He was a cockney, yet lived as a market-gardener in the country. For a week or ten days in every month he and his boy disappeared on some mysterious business in London, and the man was left in charge of the pigs and poultry, being allowed to avail himself of such local help as he could get. The boy was a peculiarly heavy-looking, stolid individual ; wore great, thick, clumping boots, and conversed mostly in grunts, his speech, when he was moved to

further conversation, being a strange mixture of cockney and the broad local speech.

Polson had come to know Scragg in the course of business, as he had got him to let his boy, for a consideration, do various errands for him in the town, which was about three miles away, and which the lower form boys were only allowed to visit on half-holidays, by special permission.

Though Scragg seemed anxious to keep up an appearance of respectability, Polson found that he was very willing to make money, and not at all particular how he made it, so long as he kept fairly within the law.

Scragg was a big, strong young fellow, and much prided himself on his skill in boxing, and, when necessary, fighting. Polson had had a good deal of conversation with him at different times, and one day he was boasting how, not long before, he had "smashed up" a giant of a fellow, who had tried in some way to "come it over him."

"There's one of our masters you couldn't smash up," said Polson craftily.

Scragg replied with an oath that he would like to see him.

"Oh, you see him often; he passes here on his way to the sea. His name is Parrett."

"Ho! What kind of a parrit—a green parrit, or one of those cockitooy kind of fowls?"

"He's a slender fellow, not tall, sandy kind of hair, quite young, with no moustache, but you can tell he's a master by the look of him."

"I b'lieve I know 'im, a cove with a parson-like kind of face, looks as though he couldn't say 'chut' to a dog, passes 'ere with two or three of your young chaps once or twice a week."

"That's him; he generally wears a straw hat with the school colours on, and carries a thickish oak stick."

"That milk-and-water bloke! I couldn't smash 'im up! Look 'ere, 'oo are you a talkin' to? Do you think 'e's a Daivid and me Goliaf? Smash 'im! I'd smash 'im wif one 'and!"

"If you can smash him anyhow, I'll give you a sov."

"A quid?"

"Yes, a whole sovereign. Pick a quarrel with him, get him to hit you first, and then do for him, and do for him well. He won't be able to say anything to the police if he hits you first."

"'E 'it me fust! Wot d'ye mean? 'E dursn't!"

"No; he may not hit you, but perhaps he'll throw you over his shoulder, or something of that sort."

"Throw *me* over his sholdier! Draw it mild, maite, or I'll be throwing you over my sholdier."

"No offence meant. He knows a bit of jiu-jitsu, that's all. So take care."

"Jew-its-yer! I seem to 'ave 'eard of it, but wot is it?"

"It's a kind of Japanese wrestling."

"Jew-its-yer! Japanese rustling! Wot do I care for any Jews 'ittin', or Japs rustlin'? I'd 'it 'em, I'd make 'em rustle. But look 'ere strite, now. You'll you give me a quid if I chaw up that mealy-faced, parson-lookin' cove, till 'is own mother wouldn't know 'im?"

"Yes, straight and square; and I'll give you five bob out of the quid now, if you'll promise to do it."

"Right! 'And over. I'll do it. Come over and guv me the other fifteen bob in a week's time. I'll 'ave earned it right and proper."

This was the conversation, reduced, as far as Mr. Scragg's language was concerned, to

the decencies of the printed page. The bargain was struck, and Scragg waited for his opportunity of carrying out his side of it.

The next Saturday Mr. Parrett and three great chums, Reynolds, another Indian boy, Smythe, and a boy from Bechuanaland, named Jackson, went past Scragg's cottage, early in the afternoon. He saw them from the window. They had their towels and bathing things, and were evidently on their way to the sea, and would have to return the same way. Scragg found that urgent business kept him at home that afternoon.

As they walked Reynolds was discoursing to Mr. Parrett on monkeys. "In Calcutta, sir, there are several colleges for Indians. Well, at one of these, a resident college for Christians, one of the young students had a small monkey of which he was very fond. Another student, a big, fat youth, named Ram Lal, used to tease this monkey unmercifully, and it came to dislike him very much. When he came near it would run away to its master and sit on his shoulder, and grin and chatter like mad. One day one of the professors heard a tremendous row as he was walking along one of the verandahs. He saw this monkey sitting on the ledge of a

window, which looked out on to the verandah, and it was jumping up and down and chattering in great excitement. In a moment the door near the window burst open, and this fat student came out, fuming with rage. He was spitting and spluttering some black stuff out of his mouth, and it was running down his scraggy little beard on to his white cotton clothes. He spat and spluttered for a bit, and then made for the monkey, which had been looking on with great interest. It immediately ran along the verandah, jumped on to the railings, and from them into the branches of a tree, and there it kept jumping up and down, and was evidently splitting its sides with laughing

"Ram Lal was very angry, and, first of all, threw both his shoes at the monkey, and then went into his room and brought out a ruler, and an inkpot, and shied those, and then his Sandow dumb-bells, and his——"

"Oh, yes," interrupted Jackson, "and his bedstead, and his tooth-brush, and his grandmother's photo, and a few other odds and ends not worth mentioning. Go on with the yarn, man."

Reynolds looked at Jackson in mild remonstrance for a moment, and then continued,

more in sorrow than in anger. "Well, as I was saying, sir, when Jackson put in that rude interruption, he shied his shoes, his ruler, his inkpot, and his Sandow dumb-bells at the monkey, but, of course, he did not hit it. One of the Sandow dumb-bells fell on the head of a sleek and well-oiled Bengali Pundit named Bhattarcharji——"

"What kind of butter?" asked Smythe. Reynolds took no notice.

"——on the head of a Pundit named Bhattarcharji. He was walking very slowly down below, with his chest very much thrown forward, and his toes so turned out that his feet were at right angles to one another as he walked. If it had not been a spring dumb-bell, sir, and the Pundit's head very thick, it would have been manslaughter; as it was, it was only a fine of three rupees from poor Ram Lal——"

"Oh, I say, Reynolds, what's the point of the story?" said Smythe. "What had the monkey done?"

"Don't be in such a hurry, my dear boy. If Jackson had not interrupted me just now, I should have come to it much sooner. Ram Lal had been sitting 'studying' with his feet on a table, and his head was hanging down

over the back of his chair. As he was very fat he snored very much, and slept with his mouth open. The little monkey had seen him from the verandah, and, quietly creeping into the room, had emptied the inkpot into Ram Lal's mouth."

"Is that a true story?" asked Mr. Parrett.

"True as they make them, sir; I heard it from a boy whose father knew the professor who saw Ram Lal with the ink on his clothes."

"Talking of snoring, sir——" began Smythe.

"But we weren't talking of snoring, were we, sir? I know Smythe wants to tell us some absurd yarn with no truth in it."

"Talking of snoring, sir——"

"I protest, sir."

"Oh, we'll give Smythe his turn."

"My father and another Government official and I, sir, were once travelling in a railway carriage from Calcutta to Berhampore. It was a night train starting from Sealdah Station at eleven o'clock. One of the lower berths was booked by a very stout Bengali gentleman dressed in English dress, and his straw hat, with a bright blue and green ribbon, was hanging on a peg. He was evidently something pretty swell. His native

servant came in, spread out his bedding, and lighted his hookah before the train started. He had a few pulls at his hookah, but as soon as we were off he went and undressed, and came back arrayed in some weird sort of undergarment with a flannel shirt dangling down over it. He lay down and covered himself with his blankets, and in less than five minutes was sound asleep—and snoring! You never heard such a snore; it would begin piano, and then become louder and louder, until it reached forty fortes! Then it would wake him up for a moment, but he would settle and begin again. The rest of the passengers sat and listened, and waited until he should snore his head off—it seemed such a moment must come.

"Presently, those of us who were going through the night partly undressed and settled down to sleep, but no such luck! All through the night the row went on, and it really seemed as though the old boy must have a megaphone up his nose. Towards morning his servant came to the carriage and asked where they were to get out. 'Berhampore,' said he, and in two minutes was snoring as loudly as ever again. At the station before Berhampore we all got up,

put on our things, and strapped up our bedding. Still the Bengali gentleman snored on.

"'Shall I wake him?' said my father's friend.

"'No, no,' answered my father; 'let him snore on now. We'll wake him at Berhampore and see the fun. He deserves it for snoring like that all night.'

"We came into the station at about six o'clock, and it was already quite light. When the train had come well to a stop, and we had already got our platform coolies, my father waked the Bengali gentleman.

"'Eh! oh! what? Berhampore Court!! Ba-ba-re-bap!!! Why you did not wake me before? My forty winks has caused me to over-step the proper limits of my siesta. This is awful jolly rot! Oh! hey! Karim! Karim!! Ao, Ao! Jalde! jalde! Hurry your wickets! Look out sharp! Mooty—e—aaaaa!!!'

"His servant and the coolies came running along the platform, and between them they managed to bundle the old boy and his bedding and bundles and boxes out before the train started again. He had to get out just as he was, and walked along the platform dressed in his straw hat, the weird garment,

and a shirt, carrying his trousers in one hand, and a silver-knobbed stick in the other. His servant walked behind with the rest of his apparel, his hookah and pail (no native gentleman travels without a pail, sir)——"

"Oooh!" from Reynolds.

"—— and then the coolies with his sticks, umbrellas, bundles, and boxes. There were several Europeans on the platform, and they were much edified. That little procession along the platform quite made up for our sleepless night."

Mr. Parrett and the boys laughed, and Reynolds exclaimed, "That's not bad for you, Smythe; and I should think it's true, for you couldn't make it up."

"Thank you," said Smythe, "for nothing."

These stories made the way short, and presently Mr. Parrett saw a small path, which he had not noticed before, leading down towards the sea. He pointed it out to the boys, and asked where it led. No one knew.

"Well, let's explore; perhaps it's a short cut."

The path almost immediately became a narrow track, and wound down to a small cove, almost shut in by cliffs, and with a

narrow opening, through which one could only get at low water. None of them had before known that it was accessible from above.

Mr. Parrett made his way down carefully and the boys followed, and arrived safely at the bottom.

The cliffs overshadowed one part of it, and formed a kind of cave, and, as they looked round, they saw in this cave a boy kneeling and filling in a hole in some white dry sand which was evidently above ordinary high water. He had not noticed their approach, as the sea was making a good deal of noise in the mouth of the cove. When he did see them he started, but then went on unconcernedly filling in his hole, and, when he had done that, began digging another some distance off. On the sand, by the side of him, lay a small green Willesden waterproof canvas bag, empty, and a pair of enormous boots.

Mr. Parrett approached him.

"Hallo, my young friend, what are you doing here?"

"Umph!" A grunt.

"Is that all?"

"Umph!" Another grunt.

"What are you looking for?"

"Wah!" And then, after a pause, "Shrimps."

"Shrimps! Ha! ha! you don't expect to find them there, do you?"

"Ah!"

"What a very uncommunicative young gentleman this seems to be," said Mr. Parrett, turning to the boys, who were grinning at his vain attempts to start a conversation.

"He's Scragg's boy," said Jackson. "aren't you?"

"Ah!"

"He comes to the school with vegetables. Don't you?" said Reynolds.

"Umph."

"Remarkable grunt he's got, hasn't he, sir?" said Smythe. "He seems to have been taking lessons from Scragg's pigs."

"Don't be rude, Smythe," said Reynolds; "he's not been taking lessons. He gives them. He teaches all Scragg's little pigs. They're famous all over the country as champion grunters."

"I've room for a few other poopils," said the boy, unexpectedly, with a sudden gleam of intelligence; "could take you cheap loike."

The other boys laughed at Reynolds's ex-

pense, and Mr. Parrett said, "That was a Roland for your Oliver, Reynolds."

"Yes, sir; he's not quite such a fool as he looks."

As no further rational conversation was to be got out of the youth, Mr. Parrett and the boys waded out of the little cove, and, going a little farther along the beach, had their bathe, and then, climbing by another path to the top of the cliffs, made their way home. The conversation again turned on monkeys.

"You know, sir," said Reynolds, "in India there are big, grey-faced monkeys, with long tails, which the Hindus hold as sacred, and no one ever kills them."

"Yes," broke in Smythe, "but I knew a Hindu once who had been to a mission school, and had lost his belief in sacred monkeys and all that sort of thing, and one of these Hanumans, as they are called over there, a great big fellow, gave him an awful amount of 'dik' in his mango garden, and so one day he shot at it with a gun and badly wounded it. His old father was fearfully upset and in a terrible fright; he caught the wounded monkey, dressed its wound daily, nursed it as though it had been a human, got it well, and at last let it go, after he had

daily offered it a plate of native sweets in order to turn aside its anger."

"Look here, Smythe," said Reynolds, "that's all very interesting, but I was going to tell Mr. Parrett a story, and you had better wait till I have finished if you've got any more yarns to tell. My yarn's a much better one, and, besides, it's true."

Mr. Parrett smiled.

"True!" exclaimed Smythe. "So was mine!"

"Of course! But never mind. Now for my yarn. At one station where my father was Collector the monkeys gave us an awful amount of 'dik,' as Smythe called it. 'Dik,' sir, is a Hindustani word, and means bother, trouble."

"So I should have guessed," said Mr. Parrett.

"Yes, sir; but poor Jackson has not your brains."

Mr. Parrett and Jackson proceeded to punish Reynolds suitably, and then Reynolds went on:

"But you keep on interrupting my story! These monkeys stole the fruit from the trees, they broke into the house and ate the food, they tore up the thatch from the roofs of the

servants' houses, they made sudden descents upon the bearer or cook and snatched away any good things they might be carrying, they broke the——"

"Ten commandments," interrupted Smythe; "you can safely leave us to imagine the rest of what they did, Reynolds."

Reynolds turned on him a withering glance, and then appealed to Mr. Parrett. "Sir, will you not protect us from Smythe's interruptions; he is really quite irreverent, and, besides, he puts me out."

"Smythe, give poor Reynolds a chance; one needs absolute quiet when one is putting a strain on one's imagination."

"Thank you, sir," said Reynolds gravely. "Well, we dared not touch these monkeys; to kill one would have been to bring the whole town down upon us, and you know the Government officials have to be awfully careful in India."

"Yes; especially great men like Collectors," murmured Smythe. Smythe's father was only a District Engineer.

"Well, we could stand it no longer, and my father called the servants together, and took counsel as to what was to be done.

"'If the Presence will give me the order and

two rupees,' said the Baburchi, 'I will promise to free the garden of monkeys by to-morrow about this time.'"

"Quite nice and scriptural in tone, isn't he, sir?" said Jackson.

Reynolds severely ignored the remark.

"My father agreed to what the cook said, and only ordered him to do nothing rash, nor anything that could offend the Hindus. Well, sir, the cook called us the next morning to see the fun. Before the Hanumans came for their morning visit he got a lot of balls made of fried rice and treacle, rubbed strong chillies well over and into them, and strewed them all over the flat roofs of the cookhouse and outhouses. Then he laid down a number of good strong clubs, and hid himself where he could see the fun, and signed to us to do the same."

"I say, Reynolds, cut it short," pleaded Smythe.

"If you don't want to listen you can walk behind," said Reynolds with dignity. "Do you not find it interesting, sir?"

"Intensely; I want badly to hear the *end* of the story."

Reynolds looked doubtful over the nature of this remark, but continued. "Well, the

Hanumans came, and began greedily to snatch up the rice balls and stuff them into their cheeks and mouths. In less than a minute and a half——"

"One minute twenty-nine and four-fifth seconds, to be quite correct," interpolated Smythe.

"——In less than a minute and a half," repeated Reynolds solemnly, "they began to wonder what on earth had happened to them. They danced and coughed, jumped and choked and sneezed until we almost died of laughing——"

"What a pity that you did not laugh just a little more," sighed Jackson quietly, but fervently.

"——And then they picked up the clubs and began hammering each other with them, until they drove each other out of the compound and into the road, and then they attacked the Babus, who were just going off to their morning work in the offices and courts. You should have seen the poor, stout, simple Babus, with their dhuties and shawls flying in the wind, and the Hanumans after them, laying into them for all they were worth with the clubs. It was absolutely the funniest sight I ever saw."

"I should imagine so," said Mr. Parrett dryly.

"Well, sir, the Hanumans never came back again to our compound, and my father gave the Baburchi a rise of two rupees for his cleverness."

There was a very solemn and meditative silence after this story, until Jackson began.

"In Africa, sir, we do not have Hornymans, nor clever Baby-gees, nor even simple, fat Baboos; we only have simple baboons——"

"And do you know the difference between them?" asked Reynolds.

Jackson pondered.

"There is a difference," said Reynolds.

"What is it?" asked Jackson.

"That," said Reynolds, pointing to a bantam hen, which was quietly walking in the lane, clucking along its homeward way.

"What do you mean?" asked Jackson.

"Don't you see," said Mr. Parrett, "the difference is a *little 'en;* it's one of Reynolds's foul and almost ineggsplicable puns."

"Oh! oh!" cried Reynolds, and he proceeded to "shoo" up the lane the innocent cause of these wicked plays upon words. The hen half flew, half ran before him, until it came to a gate of a small cottage garden,

over which it flew with many an outraged cackle.

From that gate stepped out the burly Mr. Scragg, caught Reynolds by the arm, and gave him a good box on the ear.

Reynolds was quite taken by surprise, but struggled wildly to wrench himself out of Scragg's powerful grasp. It was all to no purpose.

CHAPTER VII

MORE JIU-JITSU

"YOU leave my broodin' 'ens alone," roared Mr. Scragg, and gave Reynolds another box on the ear.

Mr. Parrett hurried up. "Leave go of that lad," he shouted, as he came up; "he did no harm to your fowl."

"And who are *you*, pray?" said Mr. Scragg, with elaborate politeness; "any'ow, I should advise you to keep your breaf to cool your own tay."

Scragg was in his shirt-sleeves, and quite prepared for business.

He was about to box the ears of the struggling Reynolds again, when Mr. Parrett made a quick movement, and Scragg felt a smart jerk and twist of his wrist which seemed to dislocate his fore-arm. Then there was a sharp, sudden twirl, which sent him spinning

round, causing him to leave go of Reynolds and very nearly fall to the ground.

For a moment Scragg nursed his arm and collected his scattered wits, and then, with a howl of rage, he made a rush at Mr. Parrett, aiming a blow at him which would certainly have smashed up that gentleman if it had taken effect. But it did not; Mr. Parrett skilfully evaded the rush, ducked, closed, and, taking full advantage of the momentum of the burly Mr. Scragg, by another quick jerk sent that gentleman flying full length along the road. He made a good attempt at ploughing up the lane with his arms and knees, and then picked himself up slowly, with a scratched face, arms stripped of a good deal of their skin, and trousers torn at the knees. He looked mad with rage, and mindful of his "fifteen bob," he made another murderous rush at Mr. Parrett, only to find himself pitched this time on to his shoulder. He now lay still, for he was stunned.

Mr. Parrett bent over his fallen assailant and examined him carefully. He found his shoulder dislocated, and sent the boys into the house for some water, and then bathed his forehead and face till he revived. Scragg looked very dazed at first, but then memory

came back, and he started up as if he would renew the attack.

He sank back, however, helpless and groaning from the pain in his shoulder, and allowed Mr. Parrett and the boys to help him into the house. Here they laid him on a bed, and Mr. Parrett, who knew something of " first aid," got his shoulder back into place, and bathed and dressed his skin-wounds very gently with some butter and soft rag. Scragg had to submit to these attentions with the best grace that he could muster, but gradually the scowl cleared from his face as he noticed the quick, skilful way in which Mr. Parrett worked.

Just as they had made him as comfortable as they could under the circumstances, their acquaintance of the afternoon came clumping in. He had not seen or heard anything of the encounter. When he came in and found his master lying on a bed, and Mr. Parrett and two or three boys with him, he showed no surprise, but merely remarked, " Ho ? "

" Your master," said Mr. Parrett, " has got hurt, but he's all right again now, and only needs looking after. We'll leave him in your charge now, and I'll look in again to-morrow morning."

Scragg's boy looked at his master stolidly, and after some moments replied, "Ho!"

"You understand?"

"Uph!" with another stolid stare; then he found speech. "'Ere, 'oo's 'urt 'im?"

"Oh, it was a kind of accident," said Mr. Parrett modestly, "caused by jiu-jitsu."

"Ho! was it? Then hif Hi meet Mr. Jewy Jitsoo Hi'll knock 'is heyes out. You can tell 'im."

After this long speech he relapsed into a number of snorts and grunts plainly expressive of violent indignation.

At last Scragg broke silence. "Shut up, Snorty," he said; "yer don' understand nuffin abaht it. 'Oo-its-yer' ain't a pusson, hit's a kin' of Jap rustlin', see?"

Then, addressing Mr. Parrett with marked respect, he added. "Hit oughter be called 'Oo-its-yer.' Blaime me if I 'ardly knows 'oo 'it me, and 'ow yer did it. Ye're a Daivid, mister, and no mistaike, yer a Daivid and slung me out like Goliaf. Ho, yus; I knows abaht 'em. Larnt 'em at Sunday school, I did."

"Oh, you went to Sunday-school, did you?"

"Yus; in Bath Lane; sooperintendent

was James Waite, Esq., and my teacher was Mr. Jacob Trott; nice man 'e was, very nice, but a little meek and mild, like I *thought* you was. But, my! I wouldn't taike you on again, not for nuffin under ten quid, I wouldn't. Yer might dislercate my neck nex' time. But, mind yer, mister, I bear no malice. Ye're a gent, and dun me up like a orspital surgin—the wai yer tied that 'ere sholdier and laid on the butter was a treat, a fair treat it was. No, bless yer, I bear no malice, but you bet, maite, that the bloke 'oo's responserble for this job will 'ave to pay for it, that's hall!"

"I don't understand you."

"Least said, soonest mended; but 'e'll pay for it, you bet. No smart young jackasnipe isn't goin' to come it over me, settin' me up like a fool agin this 'ere 'Oo-its-yer.' No, mister, 'e'll pay for it."

As Mr. Scragg refrained from saying more, and seemed somewhat tired after his long speeches, they left him, after Mr. Parrett had given Snorty a few directions, which he received with more grunts of varying significance.

Mr. Parrett, on the way back to school, asked the boys to sav nothing about what

had happened; but they refrained from giving a promise, for the story was too good to keep to themselves. It soon leaked out, and every one in the school soon knew of Mr. Parrett's encounter with the redoubtable Scragg.

From that time Mr. Parrett almost lost his other nick-names, and was no longer called Poll, but "Daivid."

CHAPTER VIII

POLSON'S DIFFICULTIES

MR. PARRETT had a very shrewd idea as to who the "bloke" was who was "responserble" for Scragg's action, but he had no proofs, and determined to say nothing about his suspicions. He felt certain it must be one of the boys, because he knew no one outside, and, besides, only one of the boys would have been likely to tell Scragg anything about "Jap rustlin'," or "Oo-its-yer." Mr. Parrett knew that Polson hated him, that he had plenty of money, and that he was a thoroughly unprincipled boy, and he determined to keep a watchful eye upon him in the future, as there was no telling what form of revenge his baffled hate might take. He might, probably, have found out for certain from Scragg who the "bloke" was who "was going to pay for it," but he preferred not to make any more fuss about the matter.

His suspicions were confirmed the following week when, on entering Scragg's cottage to ask how he was, he caught a glimpse, through a small window looking into the little back garden, of a boy, who he was almost certain was Polson, slipping through the back gate.

"You've had a visitor?" he said to Scragg.

"Yes," replied that gentleman; "it was a boy from the school. I don't know his name; he came to see me about some prize rabbits I had got for him."

In truth it was Polson. He had been passing the cottage, and Scragg, with his arm in a sling, had been standing at the door and had called him in.

"Well," said Polson, "you did not earn your fifteen bob, after all."

"Didn't I?" replied Scragg surlily. "I rather think I did, and a bit more."

"But you didn't smash Parrett up," said Polson with a grin.

"No, but 'e smashed me up, and that's a good bit worse; and look 'ere, my dandy cove, don't you come 'ere grinning all over your faice, or you'll 'ave no faice to grin over, see? And now 'and over that fifteen bob fust, and then we'll talk."

"No fear," said Polson; "the bargain was that you would get a quid if you smashed him up."

"That's all right," answered Scragg; "but now the bargain is that you 'and over fifteen bob because *'e* smashed *me* up. Besides, 'e's a real gent, and you oughter be ashaimed for settin' me on to sich a nice bloke, and I'm goin' to punish yer, see?"

"No, I don't," said Polson.

"Oh, you don't, don't you; then I'll 'ave to maike you see in a way you won't like," said Scragg, and he quickly locked the back-door and pocketed the key, and before Polson knew what he was doing, had slipped across the room and put his back against the front door.

Polson turned pale; Scragg as a friendly conversationalist was amusing, and as an ally was very handy, but Scragg as a foe, alone with one in a lonely house, was neither handy nor amusing.

"Now," said Scragg, seeing the impression he had produced, "you didn't tell me straight and proper wot that jew-jits-yer was, or I wouldn't 'ave taiken on the job, you bet, and all along of you I've lost eight days' work, and I'll lose another two weeks at least, and

that's the best part of a month. Now wot I says is, 'and over that fifteen bob now, and guv me another thirty bob within a week's time, and I'll say no more abaht it ; but play any of your 'anky-panky tricks with me, and I'll go straight to your boss, and tell 'im heggsactly wot 'as 'appened, and then, my dandy cove, you'll be *hup* a tree, and no mistaike."

Polson demurred and argued and pleaded, but it was no use. He said that he had not got fifteen shillings with him, and that he couldn't possibly get thirty shillings within a week.

" All right," said Scragg ; " turn out your pockets, and I'll taike wot's in 'em now, and you bring the rest of the fifteen bob tomorrow, see ? "

Polson turned out his pockets and produced his last half-sovereign, two shillings, a sixpence, and five coppers. Scragg took them all, and made him promise faithfully to bring the other two shillings and a penny on the following day.

" And now," he said, when that was satisfactorily arranged, " besides that you'll bring me thirty bob within a week, for compensation for lost labour, or we'll maike it ten days.

If you don't, then I go straight to your boss, see ? "

"I can't do it," said Polson; "I haven't got, and can't get it."

"Oh, yus, you can! And there's another little bill you've forgotten. There's that quid for those prize rabbits. I must have that, too, before the end of the month. I know your dear pa's naime; 'e's often written abaht in our Laibour paipers. 'E's one of these 'ere dandy company directors, and 'e 'as a few gold mines on the Rand, ain't he, eh? Oh, yus, I know 'im! Jus' write to 'is aigent, and 'e'll stump up two or three quid gladly to keep you from bein' dispelled from the school."

"No, he can't do it," said Polson. "He has strict orders from my father to send me so much a quarter, and no more. I've had this quarter's money, and I'm at an end of it. That's my last half-sov. you took just now. I only have a few shillings besides at the school."

"Oh, indeed," replied Scragg cheerfully; "well, if you 'adn't got the money you shouldn't 'ave sent me off on a job, in wot I dislercated my sholdier. You knowed all the time what that jew-jits-yer was, and I didn't,

and I'll have that thirty bob within ten days, and that other quid before the end of the month, or you'll get dispelled."

"Well, if you say anything about me, I'll tell about your trying to smash up Parrett."

"Ho! you will, will you? Don't you threaten me, or it won't be 'ealthy for yer, see? Besides, wot can your guvner do to me? 'Not taike my wegetables?' Wot wud that 'urt me? I can get more for 'em in Downton, but it's a little more trouble to get 'em there. No, no, my young dandy cove, you can't 'urt me, and if you don't pay me that money just so, you'll get dispelled. That's my last word, and I mean it."

Polson saw that he did mean it, but was going on pleading for mercy when he saw Mr. Parrett at the gate. Scragg hastily let him out of the back door, and dismissed him with a muttered threat, supported by an oath, as to what he might expect if the money were not forthcoming.

Polson returned to the school very much depressed. He had told Scragg the exact truth. His father, alarmed by his constant demands for money, had given him a liberal quarterly allowance, but had left strict in-

junctions that this was not to be exceeded for any reason whatever. He knew that he could not borrow the money, as he had got a very bad name as one who did not pay his debts if he could possibly wriggle out of doing so. He had some things he might sell, but they would not raise much. He saw that he had placed himself in the power of an unscrupulous man, who would not hesitate a moment in betraying him to the school authorities if it suited his purpose to do so.

Meanwhile, Mr. Parrett was looking over Scragg's garden, and having an interesting conversation with him. Part of it ran as follows :

" You seem to have got on well here," said Mr. Parrett, after Scragg had shown him several additions to his garden, which had been made in late years ; " you must know your business well, and it must be a prosperous one."

" Oh, yus ; I know a 'eap about gardenin'. When I was a kid I worked for a florist out Henfield way, and I larnt all 'e could teach me, and a bit more, I did ; took to gardenin' like a bobby to beer. But bless yer, sir, yer can't maike money by this kind of laibour with yer 'ands now-a-days, unless you 'ave

a real big garden, and work with other people's 'ands. You need to use yer 'ead and yer wits. I use mine. No one knows 'ow I maike money, and it's no affair of theirs, but I'm maiking it, and give me one or two more lucky years and I'll 'ave enuf to get a real swell garden, and a shop too, in Downton."

"And then you'll marry and settle down, I suppose, Mr. Scragg."

"Yus, mister," and Mr. Scragg grinned rather sheepishly; "then I'll marry and settle down. I 'ave a gal in my eye, too, a good gal she is, straight as you make 'em, and pretty—pretty as my flower garden! And she's give me 'er 'eart, she 'as, and 'er 'and would follow it pretty quick; but 'er father's a master workman, and 'e sez he won't give 'is darter to no one 'oo can't keep 'er like a laidy. Religious folks, too, they be; chapel, prayer-meetin's, tea-fights, 'allelujah-amen, all that sort of thing. Why, bless 'ee, mister," and here he lowered his voice and waxed very confidential, for he had very much taken to Mr. Parrett, "if they only knew 'ow I maike money they'd 'ave nuffin to do with me. They think I've only got this little market garden. Ha, ha! bless 'ee, they do; they don't know my real business."

"But, Mr. Scragg, in making money, I hope you keep within the limits of the law."

"The law? wot's the law? Cushined chairs, cigars, champagne, the swell club for the rich cove 'oo's stolen 'is thousands by formin' bogus companies, or sweatin' the poor, and the jug, the tread-mill, and oakum-pickin' for the pore cove that's taiken 'arf a crown becos 'is wife and kids is starvin'. The law! I ain't got much use for the law. Straight!"

"Yes, but apart from the law, there are such things as honesty and character. You're such a good sort I'd like to be able to respect you thoroughly as a good, straight, honest man, and so would that young lady of whom you were speaking."

"Yus, that's so! But if I've anything to do that's not quite on the straight, I taike good care to cover up my tracks, I do; her'll never know."

"Well, Mr. Scragg, you're playing a dangerous game, whatever it is. Make money honestly, even if you make it slowly; that's my advice to you. It will pay you much better in the long run, and when you come to settle down, it will be with an easy conscience, and the police won't always be standing behind your chair."

"Thanks, mister; yer mean well, I know; but I must maike money, and unless you can show me a quicker way of maiking it than I'm now doin', I must just keep on as I am."

"Well, I'm very sorry. I don't know just how far you're off the straight, but a crooked way takes you to queer places. Of course, what you've said to me this afternoon is sacred, but if apart from that I come across your crooked tracks, as an honest man, I shan't spare you. And another thing; I can't let any of the boys come here for 'prize rabbits.' You're a good deal too clever for them, and might make money out of them in too quick a way."

"Ha, ha!" laughed Mr. Scragg, "you're a rum 'un, mister; but don't trouble yourself; yer'll never come across *my* tracks; they don't run your way, and as for the boys, if none of them come 'ere, I shan't lose a fortin'."

At that moment they came in sight of Snorty, who was busy weeding, and who at sight of them gave a grunt, which was probably a sort of greeting to Mr. Parrett.

"Is he any relation of yours?" asked Mr. Parrett, in order to change the subject.

"Wot, Snorty! Bless yer, no! Snorty was

a horphin in London, and one of these 'ere sharper fellers came across 'im, and tried to train 'im as a pickpocket and thief, but Snorty's 'ands and feet weren't maide that way, as yer can guess, and that sharper cove nearly killed 'im by thrashin' and starvin' 'im. I 'appened to come across that cove, and nearly killed *'im; 'e* didn't know no jew-jits-yer, and I took Snorty away from 'im, and 'ave kep' 'im ever since. Terrible slow and stoopid 'e is, but faithful! If 'e'd knowed it was you 'oo 'urt me t'other night, 'e'd 'ave done yer some mischief, 'e would, jew-jits-yer or no jew-jits-yer!"

"Well, Mr. Scragg, good night; thank you for showing me round your garden. It's splendid. If at any time I can help you in any straight way, come to me. I owe you something for that bit of Jap wrestling I brought off on you—I hope your shoulder will soon be all right again."

Mr. Scragg grinned. "Oh, never mind o' that, that's all right; somebody is payng your little bill there. Good-bye, mister; I'll think abaht wot you said abaht character and honesty, but I must maike money."

That night Mr. Parrett called Polson.

"Polson," he said, "this afternoon I saw

you sneak out of Scragg's place by the back gate as I came in by the front door. What were you doing there ? "

Polson looked a little confused, but answered readily enough. " Yes, sir, I was there ; I went to see him about paying for some prize rabbits I bought from him."

" Was there nothing else ? Do you owe him nothing else ? "

" No, sir," said Polson, trembling. " I only have to pay him for those prize rabbits.'

" How much ? "

" One pound."

" Phew! One pound! I wish I could give a pound for a pair of prize rabbits. Can you pay him ? "

" Yes."

" Well, do so, and have done with it. And you're to have no more dealings with Scragg ; he's far too clever for you or any of the boys. I am going to ask Dr. Taylor to put his cottage out of bounds."

Polson went away very much relieved that Mr. Parrett seemingly suspected nothing. He had been very much afraid, at one part of the conversation, that Scragg had already split upon him, or had let out some hint which had aroused Mr. Parrett's suspicions.

Mr. Parrett wondered, as he prepared for bed that night, what Scragg's mysterious business might be. Snorty was also a puzzle to him. He doubted whether that young man was quite so heavy and dull as he seemed to be. Once or twice since Mr. Parrett had come to know him he had seen in his eye a quick glance, a gleam, quickly veiled, at something in the conversation, which did not seem to betoken a very dull spirit. And again, happening to look over the hedge once, he had seen Master Snorty, who did not know that any one was watching him, jump over a barrow that stood in his way, with an agility seemingly quite unhampered by his heavy, clumping boots. That had set Mr. Parrett thinking.

CHAPTER IX

POLSON'S AUCTION

POLSON was holding an auction, and trying thereby to get in an honest penny. It was a few days after Scragg's ultimatum. He had thought much about how he was to get his fifty shillings, and had, "on spec," written a letter to an uncle he had never met, his father's brother, who lived in Scotland, and who he knew was well off. He had never thought about this uncle in times of prosperity, but now, in adversity, his mind turned hopefully towards him.

He had made his letter mildly affectionate, and had gracefully hinted at the fact that he was in need of ready money. But, meanwhile, lest his interesting epistle should not have the hoped-for effect, he had looked round for other means of raising the wind.

He had advertised by word of mouth his

intention of holding a sale, and those interested were now gathered together in the gymnasium.

Our friends, Reynolds, Smythe, and Jackson, were there—they generally hunted in a trio.

Polson had taken one shilling and a penny halfpenny, and was now holding up a hand-camera for sale. He was very red in the face, and seemed a little confused.

"This," he said, "cost three guineas a year ago. It has a splendid lens and is very fast ——"

"Something like its owner," interrupted a spectator.

"I have taken an express train with it——"

"That's so," shouted Reynolds. "I've seen the picture, and you couldn't tell it from a London fog."

"You shut up, Reynolds!" said the auctioneer angrily.

"Oh, certainly; sorry I interrupted."

"Um—eh—yes—I—I——" began Polson again.

"Exactly, so did I, didn't you?" Smythe asked Jackson.

"Um—eh—yes," replied Jackson.

"Here, I'll punch your head, Smythe!"

exclaimed the desperate auctioneer; "and yours, Jackson."

Smythe and Jackson cowered before his wrath, and clung to one another in an extremity of fright.

"How much for this excellent hand-camera?" said Polson, without further introduction.

There was a chilling silence.

"Now, gentlemen, make a bid," pleaded Reynolds; "think of the possibilities of the instrument; it's so fast that it would even snap-shot Cornflour pretending to try and save a boundary, just as though he were standing still."

This was a distinct hit, as Polson had, in the first match of the season on the day before, irritated the whole school by hopeless laziness in fielding, so that a roar of laughter, mingled with jeers, followed Reynolds's words.

Polson darted an angry scowl at Reynolds, and then put the hand-camera aside. The next article for sale was a bat. As soon as he held it up some one inquired, "Hallo, Polson, giving up cricket?"

"No," some one else replied for him; "only first eleven cricket."

"This is a spare bat I have," Polson began

with dignity; "you will see that it is cane-spliced, with india-rubber insertion, and it is in thoroughly good condition."

"Is this its second or third season?" asked a possible buyer.

"Its third," answered Reynolds, kindly speaking for Polson; "but Cornflour takes such care of his bats—never hits a ball with them. He made *all* his duck's eggs last year with this bat. It hasn't got a scratch on it."

"I'll give you eighteen pence for it," said a bidder after testing it carefully; "it will do for practice."

"One and seven."

"Ha'penny," shouted a third, and the bidding went up by half-pennies in quite a spirited manner to two shillings; but there it stopped.

"Oh, this is absurd!" remonstrated Polson; "the bat's worth at least ten bob."

"What! It was only seven and six three seasons ago."

"What!" roared Polson. "Where could you get a bat with india-rubber in the handle for seven and six? It was twenty-one shillings at the beginning of last season. My pater gave it to me."

"Besides, remember how many duck's

eggs Polson hasn't broken with it," exclaimed Reynolds; "why, I'd give him half a crown for it myself."

There was no further bid, and the bat was wrathfully laid aside with the camera. So the sale went on, and at its close he had taken three shillings and a halfpenny. This was discouraging.

Reynolds waited with him while he collected the things he had not sold.

"You might have let me have that bat for half a crown," said he; "I wanted to offer it to Parrett on Saturday."

"What for?"

"Oh, I hear that he's going to play against St. Anne's, and he would have liked such a distinguished bat to play with."

"Molly going to play against St. Anne's? What rot! he can't bat a little bit."

"Well, we shall see. But why do you always call him Molly? It's a senseless name."

"I call him Molly because he is a molly, a regular mollycoddle."

"I don't think you've found him so. You've never scored off him that I can remember."

"I've never tried."

"Not since the first and only occasion. Anyhow, you couldn't if you did try."

"What will you bet?"

"I don't bet, but I'd give you five bob for your old bat if you ever did."

"All right; but when I do score off him, mind you're not to let on to Parrett, or any one else."

"No, of course not; but what's the good of your trying? You're sure to get the worst of it."

"Wait and see."

Polson was "on the make," and he cudgelled his brains to think how he could take a rise out of Mr. Parrett without being found out. At last he thought he had found a way.

CHAPTER X

A PUNISHMENT THAT FITTED THE CRIME

POLSON had heard of a certain mixture of bees'-wax, seccotine, varnish, and glue, which only needed a little warmth to make it stick to anything pressed on it. He got these ingredients through Snorty, and melted them on a gas jet when no one was about. Then he ran to the class-room in which Mr. Parrett taught, and rubbed them while still soft well into the seat of the wooden chair which stood behind the master's low desk.

His class, the Fourth Form, happened to be the first to be taken by Mr. Parrett on the following morning. Polson had experimented with the chair before morning preparation, and had found it entirely satisfactory; in fact, he had nearly stuck indissolubly to it himself. It was a trifle more shiny than usual, but a little dust sprinkled on and

lightly rubbed over it soon gave it its ordinary appearance. Now if only luck would favour him he might hope to see Mr. Parrett in a real fix, and get five shillings for his bat.

Mr. Parrett came into the class, sat on the chair without noticing anything peculiar about it, and went on with the lesson. After about ten minutes or so he wanted to write something on the blackboard, and attempted to get off his seat. He at once became aware that he was fastened to it, and could not get off without the danger of sacrificing part of his garments. He at once suspected a trick, and sat quite still, thinking what to do. He looked quickly round the class. No one had noticed his dilemma. But stay—what did that half-grin and that hasty side-glance on the part of Polson mean ? Mr. Parrett went on quietly with the lesson, but after a few seconds looked up quickly again. No one in the class was watching him, except Polson, and he, on catching Mr. Parrett's eye for the second time, looked conscious, and even blushed a little.

"So Polson is the culprit," thought Mr. Parrett, "and evidently waiting to see how I shall get out of this difficulty, And however

shall I do it without making myself absolutely ridiculous ? "

He saw a chance. It was a history lesson, and in the portion they had had to learn for the day he saw this rather curious sentence: "The king's conduct was often eccentric, and, sometimes, to say the least, something more than eccentric."

Mr. Parrett picked out the dunce of the class, a boy much bigger and older than the other boys, and who had only got to his present position by being moved out of each class when he had got too old to stay in it.

"Jobbings, the history says that 'the king's conduct was eccentric, and sometimes, to say the least, something more than eccentric.' Can you tell me the meaning of that sentence ? "

Jobbings could not.

"Well, I will help you by an object lesson. If I were to pick up my chair like this and walk with it to the door, and then sit down again, what would you say my conduct was ? "

"Mad," said Jobbings.

The class laughed, Polson especially.

"No, not quite as bad as that, I think; but you might call it 'eccentric.' But if I were to pick it up again and walk out of the

door like this, you might say it was 'something more than eccentric.' "

Mr. Parrett suited the action to the word, got outside the door, shut it quickly after him, and, with the chair still firmly glued to his person, hurried along the passage and across the short bit of playground to the masters' room in the headmaster's house. He breathed freely again; no one had seen him.

His friend, Mr. Pearson, was the only one in the masters' room.

"I say, Pearson, for goodness' sake help me off this chair. One of those little demons in the Fourth—Polson, I believe—has smeared something on to it that sticks like mad. Don't laugh now, there's a good fellow, but help me off with it; I want to get back to the class as quickly as possible."

Mr. Pearson did laugh, and laugh consumedly; but at the same time he lent a helping hand to Mr. Parrett, and the chair was taken off him, or he taken off the chair, whichever you please, with no serious injury to his clothes.

"I can't possibly sit down," he said, "until I get into another pair of trousers; these are as sticky as glue—but I haven't time to change now."

All this had not taken very long, and Mr. Parrett returned to his class, carrying his chair with him.

Meanwhile, his strange exit had caused some remark.

"I wonder whatever Daivid was up to, going out like that," said one boy, when he saw that Mr. Parrett did not at once return.

"Oh, it was just his way of getting something into the head of old Jobbings, and that's not an easy job. What does eccentric mean, Jobbings?"

"Why, going out of the room carrying your chair as if it were glued to you. Think I didn't understand that?" said Jobbings scornfully.

The class roared.

"Why," ventured Polson, when the laugh died down, "it looked to me as though his chair was glued to him."

"Go on, you ass, Cornflour, it wasn't! I tell you Daivid was only giving Job one of your favourite object lessons."

A heated discussion arose. Polson daren't say plainly that he had glued Mr. Parrett to his chair, lest in the inquiry, which he supposed must follow, the fact should come out. But he upheld his side of the question with

spirit, and just as Mr. Parrett entered the room again he heard Polson shout,

"I tell you I'm *absolutely sure* that in some way he was stuck to his chair."

When he had put down his chair Mr. Parrett said, "I'm sorry I was unavoidably detained for a few moments, boys. I hope, Polson, whilst I was out of the room you stuck to your book."

Smythe, who was in the form above and behind Polson, gave him a sly but sharp kick, and Polson moved uneasily, making the form creak.

"Don't fidget like that, please, Polson," said Mr. Parrett. "Now, Jobbings, what does eccentric mean?"

Jobbings, warned by the former laugh, hazarded another answer, "Your conduct, sir."

"Good; but why was it eccentric?"

"Because Polson said you were stuck to your chair, sir."

"Yes, so I heard. Polson seems to have some eccentric ideas." Another kick from Smythe, again Polson jumped, and the form creaked worse than ever.

Mr. Parrett was watching his opportunity.

"Did I not tell you a moment ago not

to fidget like that, Polson? Come out here."

Polson, taught by former experience, went without lingering.

"Now, as you can't sit still in your own seat, sit in that chair."

Polson hesitated.

"At once," said Mr. Parrett, in his jiu-jitsu voice.

Polson sat down looking very uncomfortable. After a moment he said, "The seat seems to be rather sticky, sir."

"Indeed, it will help you to sit more quietly, then. Now, don't fidget," as Polson changed his position, in hopes of warding off the evil fate which he felt was coming quickly upon him.

Polson had no option but to sit still.

Mr. Parrett was still speaking in his jiu-jitsu voice, and in a little while Polson could not have moved even if he had wanted to. Meanwhile, the class began to think that Mr. Parrett's conduct was "something more than eccentric." Just before the class was over Mr. Parrett said, "Go to your place, Polson."

Polson attempted to get up, but failed.

"What's the matter?"

"I—I—can't get up, sir."

"Why?"

"I am stuck to the chair." The class started smiling; they began to understand things a little better.

"Indeed, how strange!" And then, after careful inspection, "Why, so you are! Well, we must help you off; you can't go about with that chair stuck to you all day; such conduct would be very eccentric. Come here, Reynolds and Smythe, please." Reynolds and Smythe came with alacrity. "Throw your weight on to that chair, will you?"

They did so. Mr. Parrett took hold of Polson firmly and gave a smart jerk. There was a rending sound, and Polson was almost free, but not quite.

"Dear me! Dear me!" said Mr. Parrett, "how very unfortunate. You had better go upstairs, chair and all, Polson, and get some more clothes from the matron."

Polson had no other course, and so he walked out of the room, carrying the chair behind him, and toiled painfully upstairs to get a change of raiment.

"What a very sticky chair," observed Mr. Parrett, when he had gone; "it must surely have been re-varnished lately."

As soon as the class was over, and Mr.

Parrett had left the room, Jobbings asked in wondering, but slow tones, "What does all this mean?"

"Don't you see, Job? Cornflour had doctored Parrett's chair, and Parrett stuck to it, but instead of making any fuss he showed you what eccentric meant, and got out of the room in as smart a way as possible under the circumstances. Then he twigged that Cornflour was the culprit, and brought off that pretty little bit of punishment we have just seen. It fitted the crime, and no mistake."

"Oh, I see!" said Jobbings, and went off into rather belated roars of laughter.

"My eye!" suddenly exclaimed Reynolds, "and there's another thing I have just thought of. I told Polson the other day that if he could take a rise out of Parrett I would give him five bob for his bat. This was his attempt. What a lark! My hat! he had a rise taken out of *him* when Parrett lifted him off that chair. I don't think I need give Polson five bob for his bat this time."

Then the Fourth went off to another class in very good spirits.

Poor Polson had a very bad time of it for the rest of that day, but the next morning his harrowed feelings were somewhat

smoothed by his uncle sending him a sovereign. Thus, by selling one or two other things, he was able to pay Scragg his thirty shillings before the right day. When he took him the money he asked Scragg to give him more time in which to pay the remaining pound.

"No," said Scragg; "you've managed to pay this thirty bob, and you'll be able to find the other quid somewhere. You've kept me waiting too long already for this money, and I'm not goin' to 'ave it no longer. You pay me before the end of the month, or I go to your guvner, see?"

Snorty added a grunt full of approval, and Polson left, wondering how he could get the other pound.

CHAPTER XI

THE ST. ANNE'S MATCH

THE 'Imps' were playing St. Anne's School at cricket. St. Anne's was the only school in the neighbourhood which could hold its own with the "Anglo-Indian and Imperial." The match had come off rather early in the season, and it was only the second the 'Imps' had had.

Polson had played in the first match. He was a very fair bat, but hopelessly lazy in the field, and although he had made a few runs, he had lost more for his side in fielding than he had scored with the bat. The consequence was that Morrell, the School Captain, had dropped him in the match against St. Anne's, and had put in Mr. Parrett, as masters were playing on each side. Now Mr. Parrett, so far, had not shone much in batting. At school he had played a good deal of cricket, and had shaped very well, but he had not played much

since leaving school, and had not yet got into form. He was, however, very active and hard-working in the field, and Morrell had put him in as eleventh man.

Polson had been very angry at this, and it had stirred up afresh all his ill-feeling against Mr. Parrett. He had had the nerve to approach Morrell in order to remonstrate with him.

"I say, Morrell, I should like to know why you have turned me out of the team, and why, of all men, you have put that molly, Parrett, into my place. He can't make two runs to save his life."

Morrell looked steadily at Polson for a few seconds with a quizzical smile upon his face, and said nothing, and Polson got unpleasantly red.

"Well, Polson," at last he answered, "you have the cheek to ask me, after your fielding in the last match, why you were turned out of the team! I can forgive a man making mistakes in the field, if he is doing all he knows, but laziness I can't and won't have. And as for Parrett, I should like to know when *you* set up for a cricket prophet? You do know the right side of the bat, I grant you, and now and then you can make runs, but as for

knowing anything about good cricket——" Morrell broke off with a contemptuous grunt, and Polson got redder than ever. Then he went on, "Parrett has not made many runs yet in house games, but he's got good style, and give him a bit of luck and one of these days he'll make a jolly good score. And as for fielding, why, he's worth six of you! At any rate, he doesn't run after the ball as if it were a tame guinea-pig, and he were afraid of treading on its tail."

At this there was a laugh from the by-standers, for Morrell had very aptly described Polson's style of fielding.

Polson got still redder and angrier.

"Bah!" he said, "you just put him in because he's one of the masters and you want to suck up to him."

Morrell gave Polson a cuff on the ear, which sent that young man reeling, and then said, "Look here, young Cornflour, you'd better take your cheek somewhere else. *I* don't put men in, that's the work of the 'Choice Comm.,' of which I am only one. We put men in solely on their merits, and don't care a rap whether they are masters or boys. If you ever want to get into the team again you'd better learn to do a good deal more sweating in the field.

We can't afford to have men in the team who give away boundary after boundary. It's too expensive."

That was all the satisfaction Polson got from Morrell, and he went away growling to himself.

The next day the match was played. The 'Imps' did not do very well. The St. Anne's batted first, and made 185, one of their masters, who was an old Cambridge blue, carrying out his bat for 65. The 'Imps' went in and fared badly. No one, except Morrell, was able to play one of their bowlers, a slow left-hander, with a nasty break from leg. They made only 130, and Mr. Parrett got 0, whereat Polson was openly triumphant. The St. Anne's went in again with 55 to their credit.

This time they did not do so well. The old Cambridge blue began his innings as if he meant business by getting two boundaries and a two off his first three balls. The fourth was a slow one on the leg side. He hit out at it, and it looked as though he had landed it right over the ropes. Mr. Parrett was fielding at square leg, and ran hard, and just got to it, and brought off a very pretty catch, before he fell over the rope. There was great

clapping, and Reynolds, who was sitting not far from Polson, said, "I should like to see Cornflour do that."

"So should I," replied a boy named Collins, a happy-go-lucky fellow who could not stand Polson at all. "Bless you, he would not have deigned to attempt it, but with his hands in his pockets would have watched it sail over the boundary. Polson is such a dignified fielder."

"Rather; moves with decorum and state!"

They did not know that Polson was listening, but he was, and flushed up angrily. "Shut up, Reynolds and Collins!" he said; "I bet either of you half a crown that if Parrett gets another catch he misses it. That last was a vile fluke; he just put up his hands, and the ball happened to stick there."

"Your hands would never have been anywhere near," retorted Reynolds.

"I'll take your bet," said Collins. There was, of course, a strict rule against betting, and very little of it went on in the school, and there was among the elder boys a healthy feeling against it. Collins was too free and easy to care much about rules; still, he was not in the habit of betting, as he knew his father abhorred it, and he took this bet now

only because it was Polson who wanted to make it. The game went on, and it happened that the last man on the side sent up an easy catch to square leg, and it went straight to Mr. Parrett, who was now standing close in, and he held it without any difficulty.

"I'll thank you for that half-crown," said Collins to Polson.

"Oh, of course I didn't mean an easy little catch like that," said Polson, who was an accomplished wriggler.

"I don't care what you meant," said Collins. "I go by what you said, and you'll just pay up that half-crown."

Polson said nothing more, but determined in his own mind that Collins should not see the money. The truth is he was desperate. He had scraped together five out of the twenty shillings that Scragg demanded, but he did not know in the slightest where to get the other fifteen, and there were only a few more days before the appointed time expired.

The St. Anne's were now out for 116, and the 'Imps' had to make 172 to win. They started well. Morrell and one of the masters put on 51 for the first wicket, but then a rot set in, and Morrell could find no one to stick

with him, so that eight wickets were down for 112. Then Mr. Parrett went in. Polson was sitting not far from the passage-way leading from the players' tent, and as Mr. Parrett passed he said, loud enough for him to hear, "Now then for another parrot's egg."

Mr. Parrett turned round to Polson and said, "Thank you, Polson, but I'll try hard to disappoint you this time."

When he had got out of hearing Collins said, "You beastly cad, Polson, trying to baulk a fellow like that."

"What did it matter whether he was baulked or not? He couldn't make five to save his life."

"I bet you five bob that he does," said Collins. His father, too, was rich, a merchant in Calcutta, and let him have plenty of money, and he was flush now.

"Taken," said Polson. He saw a chance of getting something towards his needed fifteen shillings, and even if he lost bets need not be paid too conscientiously.

"Don't bet with him," said Reynolds in a low voice; "you'll never screw the money out of him even if you win."

"Oh I'll screw it out of him somehow."

Then to Polson, "All right, only remember you owe me two-and-six already."

Meanwhile, Mr. Parrett was walking towards the wicket. He had been feeling nervous before Polson's remark, as he had feared that he would repeat his morning's performance, but that remark had had the effect of making him perfectly cool and determined to make runs if confidence and care could do it. Morrell came out to meet him.

"Play steadily, sir; I can't make out what's been the matter with the men. There's very little in the bowling. At one end, in fact, it is rotten, and you only need to watch the left-hander carefully, and to turn well towards the pitch of the ball. I mean to try and hit now."

Mr. Parrett had two balls to receive from the left-hander, and he followed Morrell's advice, and found no difficulty in stopping them. Then Morrell had the "rotten" end, and made full use of his opportunity. He had been playing carefully, hoping to get some one to stop with him, but now he quite changed his tactics. He opened his shoulders and lifted the first ball right on to one of the tents, and off the remaining balls of the over

he got two more boundaries, and placed the last ball for one, and thus got the over again. The boys were in ecstasies.

"Three or four more overs like that and we'll win," said Reynolds, as Morrell faced the slow bowler.

"Bah! there won't be four more overs," jeered Polson; "that Molly has got the bowling by running that short bye. What an ass!"

But Mr. Parrett played the slow bowler with perfect confidence, and drawing the last ball prettily for three, got the bowling again.

"I say, Cornflour, how about your five bob?" said Collins. "It won't be in your pocket long."

"It's quite safe," snarled Polson. "Why doesn't Morrell keep the bowling to himself? Molly can't last another over."

"Another run for Parrett," announced Collins.

Morrell again hit out, and made six more. The score was creeping up, and interest in the result began to revive. In three overs this wicket had put on 26 out of the 60 needed. If only Parrett could last! He had the slow bowler again. The ball was too far pitched up, and, seeing his chance, Mr. Parrett

jumped in, and drove it clean and low to the boundary for four. There was much enthusiasm over this, and Collins said quietly to Polson, "You owe me seven-and-six now."

"I bet you ten bob that he doesn't make twenty," said Polson desperately. He must get some money somehow, and surely "Molly" couldn't by any chance make twenty!

"Done," said Collins; "but bets off if Morrell makes the runs and Parrett is not out."

"All right!"

Half the runs! Only another 30 now. Mr. Parrett played the rest of the over carefully, but from the last ball got another two by a pretty late cut.

It began to dawn upon the boys that Mr. Parrett could really bat, and Polson began to fear that he might not get his money after all. He got up from his seat and strolled away.

"Getting nervous, Cornie?" jeered Collins; "can't sit still any longer, eh?"

The batsmen were now getting into the swing of the thing. The bowling was changed at the "rotten" end, but it made no difference; Morrell made eleven off the next over, and

five off part of the over of the left-hander, and Mr. Parrett added two off the same over. Only ten more; surely they would do it now! Morrell had the over, but, playing more carefully, made only four, and Mr. Parrett had to face the left-hander again with six to get. A mighty cheer went up when, cool as a cucumber, he prettily placed the first ball of the over past mid-on for four. Two more to win, and two more for Mr. Parrett's twenty! Polson, meanwhile, had walked away, not noticing much where he was going, but only wanting to get away from Reynolds's and Collins's gibes.

He suddenly found himself at the sheet fixed up opposite Mr. Parrett's end. A wicked thought flashed into his mind. No one seemed to be noticing him, and as the bowler ran up to deliver the next ball he deliberately walked across *in front* of the sheet. As luck would have it his plan succeeded. He was dressed in dark clothes, got right behind the bowler's arm, Mr. Parrett lost sight of the ball and was bowled! A groan went up from the boys. Mr. Parrett walked up to Morrell.

"I'm awfully sorry, Morrell," he said; "but it was not altogether my fault. Some one walked across in front of the sheet just

as that ball was delivered, and I quite lost sight of it."

"What a beastly shame!" said Morrell indignantly. "Who was it?"

"I am nearly certain it was Polson," said Mr. Parrett; "but I cannot be quite sure, as he popped round to the other side of the sheet very quickly."

"If it was Polson, we'll make him remember it, for he must have done it on purpose."

"I'm afraid so," answered Mr. Parrett.

The last man came in, and was bowled without scoring by the last ball of the over, so that the Imps lost by two runs.

Morrell carried his bat for seventy-five, but was in a tremendous rage when he got back to the tent.

"Hard lines, Morrell," said one of the masters to him as he came in, amid great clapping; "if you could have had another ball you'd have done it."

"Hard lines!" exclaimed Morrell; "it's worse than that. The match was lost through some one crossing in front of the sheet just as Mr. Parrett received the ball with which he was bowled. We're not sure who it was, but I'm going to find out."

The news soon spread, and there was great

indignation. Who could have been such a booby, such a blithering idiot as to do such a thing ?

Morrell saw the St. Anne's men to the train, but as soon as he got back to the school summoned a meeting for all, and, after telling the match was lost, called Polson.

" Yes," said Polson.

" Come here."

" What for ? "

" Bring him here, will you ? " said Morrell, impatiently, speaking to the boys near Polson.

" Oh, I can come by myself, thanks," said Polson, and, helped by one or two shoves from his neighbours, he slowly went to the front.

" Now then, Polson, Parrett said he believed it was you who crossed the sheet."

" Did he ? That's like Parrett; he's got a deadly spite against me."

" Now, look here," said Morrell sternly, " just stop that; this is no time for foolery. Did you or did you not cross the sheet ? "

" No, I did not," said Polson doggedly, but turning pale, for he did not like Morrell's tone.

" I believe you're telling a vile lie," said Morrell, even more sternly. " Where were you when Parrett got out ? "

"I forget exactly, but I believe I was near the tent."

"No, he wasn't," said Collins. "I saw him walk away from the tent some little time before that."

"Does any one know who it was who crossed in front of the sheet?" asked Morrell. "Some one surely must have noticed."

There was silence; seemingly every one had been so intent upon the game that no one had seen.

"If any one knows and doesn't speak up he'll catch it as badly as the one who did it."

At this a small boy named Viney, about ten years of age, got up from his place with a frightened face.

"I know," he said, in spite of a threatening gesture from Polson.

"Speak up, then, and tell."

"It was Polson."

"How do you know?"

"I was near the sheet, and saw him. I ran up to him and asked him why he did it, as it must have baulked Daiv—, I mean Mr. Parrett. He said that he did it without thinking, and threatened to half kill me if I told any one."

"What have you to say to that, Polson?"

"It's all a lie," said Polson; "that kid is just saying that because I had to lick him the other day."

"Oh, rot! you're an atrocious liar. I suppose you did this because of your spite against Parrett for having displaced you in the team?"

Reynolds spoke up. "There was another good reason why Polson should do it. He had a bet of ten bob on that Parrett wouldn't make twenty, and Parrett had already made eighteen when he was bowled."

"A bet of ten bob! With whom?" asked Morrell angrily.

"With me," said Collins, as Reynolds did not answer.

"Look here, Collins, if I hear of you betting like that again, I'll report you. All sorts of beastly mischief comes over this betting on games, and whilst I'm captain I mean to put it down. You all know that it's clean against the rules. Is there any other evidence?"

"I know Viney was near the sheet," said another boy, "for I was not far from him."

"Just one question, Viney. What did Polson do after crossing in front of the sheet?"

"He nipped behind it as fast as he could."

"That exactly agrees with what Mr. Parrett said. What did he do next?"

"He tripped over the back rope of the sheet and hurt his shin against the pin. Whilst he was looking at it I walked up to him and asked him about baulking Mr. Parrett. Then he walked away quickly, after threatening me."

"Which shin did he hurt?"

Viney considered a moment, and then said, "The right one."

"Polson, roll up your trousers and show us the right shin."

Polson did so very unwillingly and slowly, after giving a hurried pull at his sock. At first it seemed that the shin was unmarked, but Morrell pulled down the sock, and, sure enough, the skin was badly grazed.

"How did you get that?"

Polson was silent; he saw that the game was up.

Morrell looked at him in silence, with thoroughly disgusted face, and then broke out, "What shall we do to this wretched young cad who has played such a vile trick upon Parrett, and given away the match to St. Anne's?"

"I didn't mean to give away the match," said Polson in a low tone.

"No; you only meant to win ten shillings dishonestly, and to take a low revenge upon Parrett. You mean young reptile!!" Morrell clearly could find no words in which to express his feelings, but his tone was forcible enough. "What shall we do to him?" he asked again.

"Send him to Coventry"; "Make him run the gauntlet"; "Get him expelled," came back various answers.

"I think he shall run the gauntlet first, and be sent to Coventry afterwards, and he shall play no more cricket this year. And, of course, Collins, you won't pay that bet, it's off. But you may pay it to the sports fund instead, as a fine for betting. You may consider yourself lightly let off. If I hear of any more betting the matter will be brought before the Old Man!"

The boys took Polson to the playground, after arming themselves with straps, knotted ropes, towels, or anything else that would do for a scourge. It was getting quite dark now, but there was light enough for their purpose. They formed in a double line round the playground, and Polson was made to run

between them. It was understood that no boy might move from his place, but at the best it was a cruel punishment, and by the time he got round Polson was sorer than he had ever been in his life. He went to his dormitory blubbering, and the master who took prep. made no inquiries about him. He knew that discipline had been going forward, and that it was well deserved.

CHAPTER XII

MISS TAYLOR'S WEDDING PRESENTS

MISS TAYLOR, the daughter of Dr. Taylor, the Principal, was about to be married, and there was some little excitement in the school over the event, for she was going to marry one of the late masters of the school, a Mr. Waite. He had been very popular, and had left only a couple of terms previously, so he was still well known in the school. The boys had made a subscription among themselves, and had bought a handsome present for the happy couple. It was Wednesday, a half-holiday, and the wedding was to be on the Thursday.

All the wedding presents had been arranged in the Doctor's drawing-room, where the reception after the wedding was to be held, and those boys who cared to see them were invited to a private view of them on

Wednesday afternoon. There was a cricket match on, so a good many boys did not avail themselves of the invitation. Still, a considerable number did, and amongst them Polson.

Whilst he was in the drawing-room there were only five or six other boys looking at the presents, and as he was in Coventry he was left severely alone, and shunned like a leper.

There were a number of valuable gifts of all kinds. As Polson wandered round, looking at the presents, which were arranged on small tables, he approached one of the tables which was in a small recess. One of the other boys was here, and, in his hurry to avoid Polson, he brushed lightly against the table, and, without noticing it, knocked a gold scarf-pin off on to the carpet. It made no noise in falling, and the boy moved away. When he had passed on Polson glanced round the room; no one was noticing him. He stooped down and pretended to do up his shoe-lace, and in doing so picked up the pin. It was set with a fine diamond, and was evidently valuable. To transfer it to his pocket was the work of a moment. Then he finished the pretence with his lace, got up, and sauntered on again. It was within a day

or two of the end of the month, and Polson had hardly anything wherewith to pay Scragg. He was getting desperate, and when he had seen the pin fall it had at once flashed into his mind that, if he could pick it up unobserved, he might take it to Scragg, pretend that it was his own, and get him to accept it instead of the money. He yielded to the temptation, and, as we have seen, got possession of the pin. As soon as he had done so he felt very uncomfortable, for he felt that every one was looking at him with suspicion, and that somehow or other they knew that the pin was lying there in his coat-pocket. A great desire came to him to get rid of it as soon as possible.

It was now about half-past four o'clock. He walked slowly out of the room, and quietly along the passage which led to the baize swing door which communicated with the house in which the Principal's boarders, of whom he was one, lived.

As soon as he got outside the swing door he hurried along the passage and down the stairs out of the house, and quickly but stealthily made his way to Scragg's. Mr. Parrett, he thought with contentment, was safely out of the way, playing cricket and

nearly all the boys would be watching the match, so that it was not likely that he would be seen.

He reached Scragg's safely, and found only Snorty in the house.

"Where's Mr. Scragg," he asked.

Snorty did not even grunt, he merely jerked his thumb over his shoulder.

"Is he in the garden?"

Snorty shook his head.

"Is he out?"

Snorty nodded.

"When will he be back?"

Snorty grunted doubtfully.

"Can't you answer a question?" said Polson irritably.

Snorty's only answer was a slow, meaningless grin. Polson sat down and kicked his heels impatiently for half an hour.

At the end of that time Scragg entered by the back door. He had seemingly been working in the garden.

"Good evening, Mr. Scragg; have you been in the garden all this time?"

"Yus."

"Well, I've been waiting for you here for half an hour. Snorty told me you were not in the garden."

Snorty nodded an assent.

"What did you do that for?" exclaimed Polson angrily.

"Claning—pigs," said Snorty.

"'E means I was cleaning out the pig-sty when you came. Snorty is a very truthful lad, never tells a lie. Stoopid but troothful. Hey, Snorty?"

Snorty got rid of a volley of snorts expressive of his extreme truthfulness, but when he went into the small scullery Polson heard something very much like a chuckle.

"Well, Mr. Powlson, what 'ave you come for? To pay me that quid?"

"No, not exactly. I've hardly been able to get anything towards it. It's no use. But I've brought something else, which I think you may be willing to take instead. It's a scarf-pin my father sent from Kimberley, Rand gold, and a very fine De Beers diamond. It must have cost a lot, but if you'll take it instead of the pound, I'll let it go."

Mr. Scragg took the scarf-pin and examined it carefully. "Yus, seems the real thing," he said. "'Ow long 'ave you 'ad it?"

"Oh, about two years," said Polson at random.

"Ever worn it?"

"Yes, in holidays, but not much in school. It's too swell for that."

"Two years? and not a mark or a scratch on it; looks brand new, as if it 'ad come aht of the shop yesterday. Rum." Scragg looked at Polson very suspiciously, and Polson got a little red.

"Oh, that's Rand gold," he said hastily; "it's so good that it does not scratch or tarnish; besides, I cleaned it up this morning."

"Wot did yer use?"

"Some powder and chammy leather."

"Wot sort of powder?"

"I don't know its name."

"Where did yer get it?"

"At Downton."

"Wot shop?"

"What does it matter to you?" said Polson irritably. "I can't go on answering questions all night."

Scragg grinned just a little, and from the scullery came an expressive snort.

"Real dimond, I s'pose; none of yer paiste?"

"Paste, no. See how it cuts glass," and Polson took the pin and scratched Scragg's window-pane with the diamond.

"Yus, it looks the real thing, as Hi says before, but one 'as to be careful these dais. Seems to be worth a quid. By the bye, I see there's a wedding at yer plaice, eh? Yer Boss's darter bein' spliced?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"To-morrow."

"Many presents?"

"Yes."

"Any good?"

"Yes, very."

"Seen 'em, then?"

Polson nodded uneasily; he began to feel that he was on dangerous ground.

"All arranged aht on show?"

"Yes."

"This wasn't one of 'em, was it?" asked Scragg suddenly and sharply, with a cunning smile.

The question took Polson quite by surprise. He turned first red and then white.

"N-n-no, of course not," he stammered.

"Ho, I thought it might be!" The truth was that Snorty had been up to the school with some choice vegetables for the next day, and had heard a good deal of gossip from the servants, and amongst other things, that the

boys were to view the presents in the drawing-room that afternoon. He had also heard vivid descriptions of the value and beauty of the presents. His curiosity had been so much roused that he had actually gone so far as to break into speech. "My!" he had said, "I should like to see 'em. Couldn't I get a squint at 'em thro' no winder?"

"No," said the servant, smiling, and she had pointed out to him the drawing-room windows on the second floor.

As Snorty had slowly left the garden he had gazed longingly up at the windows, behind which the wedding presents were. He had come home, and told Scragg in fluent speech all he had heard.

When Polson had produced the gold scarf-pin, Scragg had at once suspected that something was wrong, because he saw that it was far more valuable than was likely to be in a schoolboy's possession.

"Yus," he continued now; "I thought it might be. No, Mr. Powlson, I don't think I wants the pin. If it '*appened* to be one of the weddin' presents, and got into yer pocket by mistaike, I think, if I was you, I should put it back where it came from to-night. Boys don't gen'rally 'ave such scarf-pins as

that aroun', and I should advise you to get rid of it."

Another snort from the scullery.

Polson said no more, he was filled with terror, fled from the house, and back to the school as fast as his legs would carry him.

"Ha, ha!" laughed Scragg, when he had gone; "I *'opes* as 'ow 'e puts that 'ere scarf-pin back to-night; it's a very nice little gem, and would look well on you, Snorty."

Snorty laughed, a low, chuckling laugh. "I hope that he does," he replied in good Board School accents. "You were quite right in not taking it; it's hardly worth while giving a quid for a thing, when you can probably get it for nothing."

Meanwhile, Polson reached the school in safety, and hoped to find that the wedding presents were still on show, so that he might get back into the drawing-room, and slip the scarf-pin back into its place. But he was disappointed; it was nearly half-past five, the match was over, and no more boys were going to see the presents. He went into tea with the rest, but could eat nothing; his one thought was how he could put the scarf-pin back. What a fool he had been! Even if Scragg had taken it he would have been sure to hear that

a valuable scarf-pin was missing, and would have come to know that that was the one. Stolen! What a terrible word! Already in imagination he saw himself expelled as a thief, a disgrace and shame to all his family.

During preparation he could do no work, and was two or three times reproved by the master in charge for dreaming instead of attending to his lessons. After preparation he went to one of the windows, and looked out. The house was built with two wings, and Dr. Taylor's drawing-room was in the wing opposite to him. He could see the windows, and lights were still shining brightly through the blinds. He watched anxiously, and at last, about nine o'clock, the lights were lowered, and Polson concluded that the Doctor and his family had gone into supper. At the same time the boys went in to their supper.

Now was his time. He waited for five minutes, and then went out of the preparation room into the passage which ran the whole length of the house. He reached the swing door safely. Joy! it was still unlocked. With the door half opened he looked along the passage. He had still to pass the Doctor's study and the dining-room. It was as he had

thought, the family were in at supper. A servant was in and out of the dining-room, but he waited until she had gone downstairs, and then darted along the passage, turned the corner, and got to the drawing-room door. He opened it softly; no one was inside, and the lights were turned down. He entered, went swiftly over to the table from which he had taken the pin, and put it in its place again. With a much lighter heart he turned to leave the room again. He had got to the door, when he heard some one coming up the stairs. After a little while another person came upstairs, there was a little talking in the passage, and then he heard Dr. Taylor's voice from the dining-room. "You may turn the lights down in the drawing-room, John, we shall not be using it again to-night. See that the windows are fastened, and lock the door carefully after you."

"Yes, sir!"

Footsteps came along the passage, and Polson had just time to slip behind a curtain, when John, the Doctor's old manservant, came into the room. He turned up one of the lights, looked round the room, put one or two things straight, and even gave a twitch to the curtain behind which Polson was

standing with heart beating so loud that he thought the old man must hear it.

What should he do ? Would it be possible to make a dart for it whilst the old man's back was turned ? No ; he would probably run straight into the arms of the servant waiting in the dining-room. Better to stay where he was. The servant, after looking round, and tidying up a bit, tried the fastenings of the windows, and as he did so he muttered to himself.

"A fine haul these would make for burglars; it don't seem hardly safe leaving them out like this. But I never heard of no burglars in these parts, that's one comfort; and besides, the windows are fairly high up."

Then he turned the lights out, went out of the room, and locked the door carefully after him, leaving Polson very much in the dark.

CHAPTER XIII

THE BURGLARS

WHEN the immediate danger of discovery was passed, Polson was able to think about his position. It was by no means a cheering one. It was now past nine o'clock, and his absence from his place in the dormitory was almost sure to be noticed. He went to the door, and turned the handle quietly, hoping against hope that the servant might have made some mistake and omitted to lock it. But no such luck!

He looked through the keyhole; there was a light in the passage, and he could see that the key was gone. The drawing-room ran along the whole breadth of the wing, and had windows on both sides, and at the end. He went to one of the windows, opened it quietly, and looked out. There was no moon, the night was very dark, and he could not judge the distance from the ground. He dared not

attempt to drop, because the lowest floor, which contained the kitchen, servants' offices, etc., was partly below the level of the ground, and underneath the windows was a sunken space, and Polson could not see exactly how broad it was. He shut the window again, but did not fasten it. There was evidently nothing for it but to wait until daylight, or perhaps even until the door was opened in the morning.

He sat down in an easy chair, and was dozing, when he heard some one at the door. He just had time to step behind his curtain when the Doctor entered, candle in hand. He had come to have a last look round before going to bed. He was just going out again when, evidently, he resolved to have a look at the window fastenings. When he found the one that Polson had left unfastened, the Doctor said to himself, "Chut! chut! chut! how careless of John; how could he have left this window unfastened?" Then he fastened it, and went out, locking the door carefully after him, and taking the key.

Polson had been in a state of terror lest the Doctor should have his suspicions aroused, and search the room, but now he breathed freely again. After a time he came out from

behind his curtain, and fearing no more disturbance, he settled himself upon the sofa, and covered himself with a light rug he found upon the floor. He stayed awake for two or three hours wondering how, on the morrow, he should explain his absence from the dormitory, even if he got back to it without discovery in the morning.

About twelve or one o'clock he fell into a troubled doze, but suddenly sat up with a start, wide awake, though unable, for the moment, to remember where he was. Memory quickly came back, and then he noticed the slight sound that had waked him. It was a scratch, scratch, scratch, at a window, one looking out on the garden, on the side opposite to the boys' quarters. He got up quickly and quietly from the sofa, and went over to look. He could see the upper part of the figure of a biggish boy clearly outlined outside the window. He was standing upon a ladder, and trying to insert a knife between the upper and lower sash, in order to slip back the window catch. Polson could not see his face, as it was masked.

Polson's heart was in his mouth. Here were burglars, and he shut up in the very room they were about to enter! What should he

do ? Give an alarm ? He dared not do that, because he could not explain his presence in the drawing-room. He must just hide himself again ! He got behind a curtain once more, and watched the burglar.

Failing to slip the knife in, he took something out of his pocket (evidently putty), stuck it against the window-pane, held it with one hand, and with the other cut out round it a piece of glass large enough to admit his hand and arm. As the glass was held firmly by the putty, it did not fall, and he placed it carefully on the ledge outside. Then he undid the window-catch, slid the window up almost noiselessly, and the next moment was in the room.

He was evidently a careful young burglar, for he lifted the piece of glass from the window-ledge, lest it should be knocked down, and placed it on a chair inside the room. He then showed the light from a very small bull's-eye lantern, and began to move about the room, looking at the wedding presents. His movements were marked by extreme lightness, and he glided about as noiselessly as a shadow. Polson, though trembling in every limb, still continued to watch him. He went about from table to table picking out the articles

that were most valuable, and easily to be got rid of, and putting them in a small bag. When this was full he let it down by a cord to some one standing beneath, and after a minute drew it up empty, and began his work again. Not a sound did the young burglar make, and his step was as light as a fairy's. Presently he came to the table on which the scarf-pin was, picked it up, and held it for a moment in the light. As he did so he emitted the only sound which he had yet made, a low chuckle which reminded Polson strongly of the sound which he had heard from Scragg's scullery a few hours before. Then he placed it in his bag, and chuckled again. He had just let down a second bagful when there was a distinct sound in the house. The burglar turned off his lantern, got out of the window, and slid down the ladder with the same quickness and lightness as he had shown in all his movements.

Polson stood confused and irresolute for a second or two, then he too got out on the window-ledge, and, holding the top of the ladder, felt round with his foot for the rungs. His movements were not so quick as those of the burglar, and by the time he had got one foot on the rungs of the ladder there was a

light in the room, and some one was running to the window. Polson threw himself on the ladder, and tried to slide down it. But even as he did so he felt a hand on his collar. The person inside the room had leaned out and made a grab at him, at the same time shouting with all his might. Polson glanced up, and could just make out that it was Dr. Taylor. He struggled violently to get free, and the ladder would unquestionably have fallen had not the Doctor unconsciously seized it with one hand and kept it steady.

As Polson struggled, something gave, and he slid down the ladder at a great rate. He reached the ground safely, and to pull the ladder down, so that no one could follow him, was the work of a moment. Then he bolted into the night, and made his way circuitously towards the boys' quarters.

The alarm had now been given, and presently he heard dogs barking, doors being opened, and people shouting questions and answers in eager, excited tones. Then he saw lights flitting about in various directions in the grounds, and soon was able, without difficulty, to join the masters and boys, who at the shouts of "Thieves! thieves!" were

pouring in a continuous stream out of the different houses.

By this time the burglars had got a good start, and as no one knew in what direction they had gone, and as there was a great deal of confusion and noise, and hardly any one knew exactly what the matter was, they got off scot-free.

Polson, meanwhile, ran into the house, and upstairs into the dormitory. The gas was turned up, but the room was empty. He ruffled up the clothes on his bed to look as if he had been in bed. Then he sat down and waited. In a few minutes two or three boys came upstairs from the grounds. They were talking excitedly, and took no notice of him. He began to undress. As he pulled off his coat he noticed for the first time that a piece of the collar was gone. The Doctor had not had much of the collar in his grip, and as Polson had struggled, the small piece of cloth he had grabbed had come away in his hand. Polson saw at once that this might lead to his detection. He determined to try to get the piece of cloth. Were all his hair-breadth escapes to end after all in his being found out? He argued to himself that the Doctor, when he failed to hold the supposed burglar, would

probably have thrown down the piece of cloth in disgust. Many persons would, no doubt, be going to the drawing-room, and in the confusion he might slip in and get possession of the scrap of cloth without being detected.

He put on another coat and hurried along to the baize door. It was locked. He went round the other way, boldly entered the door of Dr. Taylor's house, went up the front stairs, and along to the drawing-room. But when he got there he was disappointed, for the door was locked, and no one was about. The truth was that Mr. Parrett, as soon as he had heard the facts of the case, mindful of Sherlock Holmes and his methods, had at once run along and found Dr. Taylor, and had asked him to shut up the drawing-room, after roughly ascertaining the amount of the loss, so as to keep fresh whatever traces there might be of the burglars. He had also set two or three of the bigger boys to keep others away from the neighbourhood of the spot under the window through which the burglars had found entrance to the drawing-room. There was a garden bed there, and the mould would be almost sure to bear traces of those who had been there.

Polson, then, was disappointed. He heard voices from the dining-room. Mrs. and Miss Taylor, both excited and upset by the occurrence, were there, and just as Polson was turning away to go downstairs again, Mr. Parrett, who had been talking with them, came along the passage, and caught Polson.

"What are you doing here, Polson?"

"I thought that there would be others looking at the drawing-room, sir, so I came up."

"That's like your cheek! You'd better get off downstairs as fast as you can."

Polson did so, and went to bed, as the other boys were doing, now that nothing more was to be seen or done.

CHAPTER XIV

MR. PARRETT AS AMATEUR DETECTIVE

NEXT morning Mr. Parrett went over quite early, by invitation, to Dr. Taylor's. He found that gentleman up, and together they went into the drawing-room.

"How did you find, Doctor, that burglars were in the house?"

"Well, I could not sleep, for I felt that something was going to happen. About one o'clock or so, I got out of bed and looked out of my window towards the drawing-room. It seemed to me that I saw a feeble light flashing at intervals through the window. I said nothing to my wife, but crept quietly downstairs with a lamp in my hand. I should have got to the door without any one hearing me, but I stopped to pick out a good thick

oak stick from among the sticks in the hall, and, unfortunately, in doing so knocked a stick down. It made an atrocious noise, and that, probably, gave the thieves the alarm."

"Perhaps it was just as well, sir, for us and for to-day's bride. The burglars would probably have had some weapon of defence themselves, and it would not have looked well for the father of the bride to have to give his daughter away with his head bandaged and strapped like a wounded soldier's."

"As it was," continued Dr. Taylor, "I rushed into the room just too late. I at once saw the open window, and some one half way out of it. When I reached it, however, the burglar was already on the ladder. Although I grabbed him I failed to hold him, for his coat tore, and I was left standing like a fool, with a fragment of cloth in my hand."

"What did you do with that, sir?"

"I threw it on the floor, I believe."

"Oh, we must recover that, if possible," said Mr. Parrett; "it might at a later time prove to be very good evidence."

They looked round the drawing-room very

carefully, but at first could discover no clues which could help in the detection of the criminals. Dr. Taylor groaned as he looked at the tables. The burglars had run off with the choicest and most valuable of the presents.

When they approached the window, which was still open, they saw the bit of pane which had been cut out. Mr. Parrett picked it up from the chair on which it was still lying.

As he examined it he saw on the putty the distinct mark of a thumb. When he looked closer he saw that the lines on the thumb were quite distinct. In fact, he had in his hand a thumb impression which would most certainly convict any one who should be found to have a thumb resembling it, because, as perhaps even the youngest readers are aware, no two thumbs are exactly alike. He showed it to Dr. Taylor, and they put it away very carefully. Had the clever young burglar not been interrupted in his work he would probably have taken the pane and putty with him, for he would well know the advisability of leaving behind him as few marks as possible, and above all thumb marks!

Hunting about for the scrap of cloth, Mr.

Parrett came upon it lying upon the floor. He picked it up and examined it carefully. Where had he seen that pattern before—blue with small zig-zag red lines upon it ? Polson ! of course, it was Polson who wore a coat just of that pattern.

Mr. Parrett said nothing, but placed the scrap of cloth with the putty. They would both be very important witnesses.

But Polson ! Polson ! How could he have been one of the burglars ?

" Excuse me, please, sir, for a few minutes. I have an idea."

" Oh, certainly," said the Doctor.

Mr. Parrett hurried along past the dining-room and study, and through the baize door, and was soon in Polson's room, standing by Polson's bed. It was still quite early and the boys, tired with the excitement of the night, were all asleep, taking full advantage of the fact that this was a whole holiday, and that there was no morning prep.

On Polson's locker was a coat, but not of the right pattern. Mr. Parrett quietly opened Polson's locker. Sure enough there was the coat, and in the collar was a hole corresponding in size with the scrap of cloth in the drawing-room.

"What did this mean? How could Polson be a burglar, or connected with burglars?"

Mr. Parrett hurried away back to the drawing-room, thinking.

Of course, Polson had had dealings with Scragg, and if Scragg were the real burglar (an idea which had already crossed Mr. Parrett's mind), Polson might have been somehow or other mixed up in the affair. But would Scragg have allowed him, a boy, clumsy and inexperienced, to be in the house? That did not seem probable.

Had Polson opened the window to the burglars, then? No; that seemed impossible; the baize door and the drawing-room were both locked, and, besides, there was the existence of the piece of glass that had been cut out. What was the meaning of that if the window had been opened for the burglars from the inside?

Mr. Parrett could make nothing of it, but still, the bare fact remained that Polson had been in the drawing-room with the burglar or burglars.

Mr. Parrett rejoined Dr. Taylor in the drawing-room, but said nothing for the present about his discovery.

There was no further clue to be found, so

they went downstairs and out into the garden. There was some soft garden soil where the ladder had stood, and in this several footmarks were clearly visible. Mr. Parrett stooped down and examined them carefully. After a time he got up and said to Dr. Taylor, "There would seem to have been three people here at least. There are several footmarks made by a big and heavy man. He had ordinary light boots on. There are two or three made by some one with a much smaller foot, who was wearing ribbed sand-shoes. The man who wore those was probably the one who went up the ladder into the house; he wore them in order to be able to move noiselessly. There is one footmark of some one else, who, I should think, was wearing light slippers."

"Slippers? What peculiar foot-gear for a burglar! Are you sure?"

"Yes; see, the footmark is quite distinct; no boot would be likely to make such an impression as that; see how pointed the toe is."

"Yes, I think you are right."

"Would you excuse me once more, sir; I have more than a suspicion as to whose that slipper is."

Again Mr. Parrett ran upstairs, and into Polson's dormitory. Two or three boys were half awake, as it was now nearly half-past six, but none of them noticed Mr. Parrett pick up one of Polson's shoes. It was an old patent leather dress shoe, and when Mr. Parrett examined it, sure enough there was a little garden mould clinging to the heel. When he went downstairs and placed it on the footmark it fitted exactly.

"How extraordinary!" said the Doctor. "Whose is it?"

"Polson's."

"Polson's! Oh, but wait a minute. It must have been caused by his coming here to look at the fallen ladder after the flight of the burglars."

"That is, of course, possible," said Mr. Parrett, "were there not other circumstances. But perhaps I had better say no more now, as I may be doing the boy an injustice."

The ladder which had been used was the school ladder, which had been standing not far off from the spot where it had been used by the burglars.

There was no more to be seen, and so Dr. Taylor went indoors.

Mr. Parrett wandered round the garden, and then followed the course of the wall, examining the flower-bed which was just inside it, to see whether he could discover any more footmarks.

"Hallo!" he at last exclaimed. "Here we are."

It was evidently the spot where the burglars had scaled the wall after the alarm. This time there were only the footmarks of two persons, the man with the boots, and the one with the sand-shoes.

"So Polson went straight indoors again, and I suppose to bed."

Mr. Parrett climbed over the wall and tried to follow the tracks, but could not do so for any distance, as the burglars had gone across a common, which was not far from the school wall, and there the footmarks did not show. It struck him that he would go past Scragg's and see whether he could notice anything there. He accordingly went on.

The lane which led to the cottage was a narrow one between high hedges, and nearly always remained more or less soft, even in fine weather. Mr. Parrett walked along it and presently saw a footmark, which made

him, like Robinson Crusoe, come to a sudden stop. It was the fresh impression of a ribbed sand-shoe on some soft ground near the ditch. He went along the lane slowly, looking out for any more such impressions. There were several more, but they stopped altogether before he reached Scragg's gate.

As he was passing he saw Scragg and Snorty in the garden. They were very busy, digging, like good and innocent gardeners.

"Good mornin', Mr. Parrett," Scragg said cheerfully; "nice day for an early walk—holiday, I suppose, to-day, for this 'ere weddin'."

"Yes," said Mr. Parrett; "but we've had an upset in the night. Some burglars came and took off the most valuable of the wedding presents."

"My 'at! Burglars in this little 'ole! I'll 'ave to lock up my spoons and plaite at night."

Mr. Parrett was watching Scragg's face very carefully, but there was not a sign of self-consciousness on it. Snorty had been shaking his head at the news in a solemn sort of way, and at Scragg's jest he gave vent to a low chuckle, but his face, too, was as clear as a sunny morning.

"Called in the perlice?" continued Mr. Scragg.

"Yes, old Blencher came last night, but could do nothing, and so went off to bed again, but he sent word that he'll be along presently. He has sent the news to Downton, of course."

"That's smartness for yer! Wy, 'e ought ter 'ave been on the spot at daylight."

"Yes, but he's getting a bit stout and slow, even for a country bobby. Can't expect too much of him. Funny that the burglars should have known about the wedding, wasn't it? Almost looks as if they must be local folks—perhaps from Downton. No one just about here would be likely to burgle."

"No," said Scragg, reflectively; "I expect you're right. Some one from Downton 'oo's 'eerd abaht the weddin'. Any one been 'angin' abaht the premises lately?"

"I did hear something about two tramps who were seen looking over the wall yesterday."

"Ah! well, them 'ave summat to do with it, you bet."

"Perhaps so."

Snorty was standing by, listening to this conversation. His hands were damp and dirty with his gardening. Mr. Parrett saw this, and a sudden idea came to him.

"Well, Snorty," he said, changing the conversation, "did you ever go to school?"

"Um," said Snorty.

"Can you read?" Snorty nodded.

"See whether you can read that?" Mr. Parrett had pulled an envelope out of his pocket, which he had received a day or two before. The address upon it was almost illegible. Snorty took it and looked at it.

"Naw," he said; "that be too much for Oi, but Oi can read print fine."

He handed the envelope back to Mr. Parrett, and it had upon it the mark of Snorty's thumb distinctly outlined in dirt.

Mr. Parrett put the envelope back into his pocket again, and after a little more conversation went back to the school. When he was out of sight of the cottage he took the envelope out and had a look at the thumb impression. "It's the very same as that on the putty!" he exclaimed to himself.

When he got back to the school he heard that the local policeman, Blencher, had again arrived upon the scene. He hurried along to see him. As he entered the drawing-room he saw that Blencher, in the momentary absence of Dr. Taylor, had picked up the piece of glass with the putty adhering to it, and was leisurely examining it. As Mr. Parrett came up he put it down.

Mr. Parrett picked it up and, going to the window, compared the two thumb-marks. He had been mistaken; they were different in every line!

Mr. Parrett rubbed his eyes; surely the thumb-mark he had seen in the morning was not like the one now on the putty. That had been rather narrow and small, this was big and spreading. An idea struck him.

"Excuse me, Mr. Blencher," he said, "but when you were examining this glass, did you happen to put your thumb on this piece of putty?"

"Loikely Oi did; whoy?"

"Oh, nothing! You have only destroyed the best piece of evidence we had."

"The best piece of evidence! What evidence was theer?"

"Didn't you see a thumb-mark on the putty?"

"Aye, Oi did. Put my thumb over it, Oi did, to see whether it fitted, Oi did." He held up a fat broad thumb.

"May I look at your thumb?"

"Aye, theer it be."

Sure enough, the new lines on the putty had been made by Mr. Blencher's thumb. Mr. Parrett stamped with vexation.

"Didn't you know," he asked, "that that thumb-mark was made by one of the burglars, and would have been of the greatest value in identifying him?"

"Oi've heerd summat o' the sort, but, bless yaow, Oi don't hold with none of these new-fangled ideas. First catch your thief, then oidentify him, says Oi. Oi don't vex mysen abaowt no thumb-marks! Naow, Oi don't! Thumb-marks!!"

Mr. Blencher chuckled good-humouredly.

Mr. Parrett considered whether he should punch the fatuous old man's head, but there seemed to be no immediate benefit to any one in doing that, so he, with some difficulty, restrained himself. One of his chief pieces of evidence had been destroyed. How careless he had been not to lock up the piece of glass

securely! But he had thought it would have been quite safe from all meddling fingers in the bookcase, where he and Dr. Taylor had placed it. So it would have been had not Dr. Taylor himself showed it to Blencher and then been called away for a few moments.

Another fear smote Mr. Parrett. "Have you been into the garden?" he said.

"Yees, o' course! Got hold of the gairdener, Oi did, soon as Oi came, an' he took me raond."

"Did you examine the ground under the window?"

"Yees, loikely; tramped all raond it, Oi did."

Mr. Parrett groaned and rushed into the garden. Yes, there, sure enough, in the soft mould under the window were the marks of P.C. Blencher's great regulation boots, and they had obliterated all traces of last night's burglars.

"Oh, the stupid old blockhead!"

He returned to Blencher.

"Why ever did you go tramping about under the window? Did you not see the footmarks the burglars left there?"

"Footmarks? Naow, Oi was looking up at

the windaow, Oi was. Saw the marks from the ladder. Theer they be, roight enough. Gairdener, he saw 'un too."

"And you didn't look for footmarks? Why, the footmarks of the burglars were all there."

"Aye, loikely. Had feet, Oi suppose."

"But you've been and trampled them all out."

"Aye, loikely," and Blencher rather ruefully rubbed his head.

"Don't you see that you've destroyed more evidence?"

"More evidence; aye, loikely," and he rubbed his head still more. "But never mind, mister. First catch your burglars, says Oi."

"Old idiot," muttered Mr. Parrett to himself; "but never mind, there are still the marks by the wall."

He started off to see that they were all right. Had P.C. Blencher trampled them all out in eagerness to see whether there were any scratches on the wall? No, fortunately, they were still there. The policeman's misdeeds had not extended as far as that.

Mr. Parrett went to Dr. Taylor and told him his suspicions, and also Blencher's doings.

"Dear me, how very vexatious! What's to be done now?"

"Well, I suppose we must get a warrant to search Scragg's house. But that will take rather long, and I'm afraid by the time we get it Scragg will have removed all his booty, even if he has not done so already. I wish the police from Downton would come."

They went to interview Blencher. He scouted the idea of its being Scragg.

"Naow, naow, it bean't Scragg. He's an honest man, is Scragg. See him often in the 'Blue Magpie.' Drinks his beer like a good 'un. He bean't a burglar; naow, naow. It's they tramps, for sure. I seed 'un this morning walking t'wards Daownton, Oi did. They'd a dawg with 'un, and one of the boys he says he heerd a dawg bark. When Oi've finished here Oi'll go home, tidy up a bit, have my breakfast, take my truncheon, and go after 'un, Oi will! Daon't you trouble yersen aboot no evidence, Mr. Parrett. Oi'll have they tramps. They're the right 'uns. First catch your burglars, says Oi!"

Fortunately, at this moment the police sergeant from Downton arrived. He was a great improvement on Blencher. He listened

carefully to all Mr. Parrett had to say, and agreed that suspicion pointed strongly towards Scragg. He went to see the remaining footmarks, and put some one on guard there to keep them safe until he could get a warrant of search and find out whether any boots in Scragg's house would fit the marks.

CHAPTER XV

MR. PARRETT TACKLES POLSON

AS soon as he could, Mr. Parrett called Polson to his room.

"Now, Polson," he began, "I have called you to know what you had to do with this burglary."

"I, sir," stammered Polson, turning two or three colours in succession. "What could I have to do with it?"

"That's just what I want to know. Why were you in the drawing-room with the burglar or burglars last night?"

"I—I—I—sir?"

"Yes, you, Polson; now, it's no use denying it. If you will tell me all I will try to help you, but if you lie or prevaricate I shall simply have to put all the evidence I have against you into the hands of the Downton police, and you know they are still here."

"Sir, I had nothing to do with the burglary."

"Well, tell me why you were in the draw-

ing-room ? I may as well inform you how I know you were there."

Mr. Parrett went to a cupboard, unlocked it, and took out a scrap of cloth, a coat, and a slipper. When he saw them Polson turned even paler than he was already.

" This piece of cloth, which you left in Dr. Taylor's hands, fits into this hole in the collar of this coat, and this slipper evidently made one of the footmarks which were found at the foot of the ladder. I have also made inquiries, and find that you were not in your bed when Mr. Pearson went to the dormitory to turn down the gas last night. Someone told him he thought you were visiting somewhere. Now, these facts will certainly implicate you in this robbery unless you make a clean breast of the whole affair. So far I have said nothing to the police, and very little to the Doctor, because I have some doubts as to whether you had anything to do with the actual robbery. Now, I will give you three minutes to make up your mind whether you will tell me the whole truth or not."

Mr. Parrett took out his watch and looked at it, and then picked up a newspaper and began to read it.

Polson's mind was in a whirl. What could

he say ? He tried to think of some plausible story, but it was no good. He could not invent one that would fit the facts. But he was not man enough to tell the whole truth. He would tell half the truth, as he could not help doing so, but the other half he would keep back.

"Well ?" said Mr. Parrett, at the end of the three minutes.

"I was not in the drawing-room for any bad purpose, sir."

"Why were you there, then ? Tell me everything."

"I went to put back one of the wedding presents which I had."

"How did you come to have it ?"

"I picked it up off the floor in the afternoon." Polson dragged the words out in a very low tone.

"Why did you do that ?"

"I don't know, sir ; a sudden temptation came to me to pick it up and put it in my pocket. I was sorry immediately I had got outside the door."

"And why did you not return at once ?"

"I had no chance, sir. All the boys left just after I did."

"What was it ?"

"A scarf-pin."

"What were you going to do with it?"

"I don't know, sir. It was a sudden impulse, and I know now that it was a temptation of Satan. I am very sorry and ashamed, sir." Polson spoke in a very low and penitent voice.

"Are you telling me the whole truth?"

"Yes, sir."

"You are keeping nothing back?"

"No, sir."

"Well, then?"

"My conscience would give me no peace, sir, and after preparation I slipped back to the drawing-room and put the pin back."

Question and answer followed one another, and Polson told how he had been locked in the drawing-room, and how he had seen the burglary.

"And why did you not give the alarm?"

"I could not speak nor move for fright, sir."

"You did not recognise the young burglar?"

"No, sir."

"And how did you escape?"

"I got on to the ladder, sir, after the burglars, and then the Doctor got hold of my

coat-collar, and in tearing myself away I left a piece of it in his hand."

"Have you told me everything now?"

"Yes, sir, everything."

"Well, I hope I can believe you."

Mr. Parrett was in a difficult position. He did not wish to say anything to the police about the matter of Polson, because he saw that it was quite possible that the boy would be arrested. After thinking the matter over for a moment or two he said to Polson, "Well, the only thing for you to do now is to go and tell Dr. Taylor every word you have told me."

Polson tried to beg off, but Mr. Parrett was inexorable, and took him off immediately to the Doctor. The whole story was laid before him. He was very much troubled at the thought of such a scandal concerning the school getting into the courts and papers, and, after consulting long with Mr. Parrett, resolved to say nothing about Polson to the police. He could give no evidence that would be of any value in discovering or convicting the thieves, and really had had nothing to do with the burglary. For the sake of the school, then, as well as for Polson's sake, the matter was kept quiet.

According to his own story, Polson had, of his own accord, gone to the drawing-room to put back the pin he had stolen, and this was certainly in his favour. Thus, eventually, it was decided to say nothing to the boys about Polson's conduct. Dr. Taylor gave him a severe caning and a solemn warning, forbade him to play cricket for the remainder of the season, and took from him other privileges, but when all was said and done Polson felt that he had got off cheaply.

CHAPTER XVI

THE WEDDING, AND OTHER EVENTS

ALTHOUGH the parties most closely concerned were naturally upset by the burglary, and the thought of the pain it would cause to friends whose presents had been stolen, the wedding could not be put off, and it took place in the little country church near the school. A number of friends came down from London by the morning train, and, notwithstanding adverse circumstances, the wedding went on with great *éclat*. Several of the villagers were present, and amongst them Scragg and Snorty, who sat in a prominent place and took great interest in the proceedings.

As the bride left the church several of the village children, with whom she was a great favourite, strewed flowers in her path. Snorty,

looking big and awkward, joined them, but instead of throwing down the beautiful bouquet of flowers which he held in his hand, he offered it to the bride. She took it with a gracious little bow and smile, and said to her husband as they passed on to the gate, "That's the boy who brings our vegetables. How nice of him! I thought he was too shy and awkward to do a thing like this."

"My dear, your charms have made even me overcome my shyness and awkwardness to the extent of going through a wedding service. After that nothing is wonderful!"

The bride gently pressed her husband's arm, but said nothing, and they got into the carriage and were driven away.

When Mr. Parrett came out of the church he saw Scragg standing by the churchyard path. He touched his hat and came up to speak.

"Nice little weddin', sir, and a sweet, pretty bride. I 'opes as 'ow some day you'll be as nicely done for as this Mr. Waite 'as been."

"Thank you, Mr. Scragg; the same to you."

"Yus, I 'opes so. I don't think as 'ow I shall wait very long now."

"Oh, making money?"

"Yus, pretty fair, pretty fair. Trade isn't bad."

"Which trade? The honest or the otherwise?"

Scragg shut his eye expressively. "Oh, that little business in London I told you about isn't goin' badly. Goin' up again by to-night's train to look after it."

"Be away long?"

"Two or three days."

"Snorty going with you?"

"Yus; too stoopid to leave behind, but wonderful boy, wonderful faithful."

"He must be a great comfort to you."

"Yus, 'e is. Does instead of a dawg. Not much use, but nice to 'ave in the 'ouse. When I goes in after bein' away a bit 'e snorts that 'appily, just like a dawg wags 'is tail."

"Very interesting. Well, good morning, Mr. Scragg."

"Good mornin', sir."

The police had meanwhile been busy and had obtained a warrant of search, so that soon after Scragg arrived home after the

wedding he saw a small body of policemen coming up the lane to his house. They were led by a big, burly man who was known as Sergeant Blobbs.

"Hallo, Snorty!" Scragg exclaimed, in a low voice; "'ere come the coppers. Be they on our track? Crikey! Good thing there ain't any of the bluff abaht."

"Shut up!" said Snorty; "go out and meet them at the gate, and look happy like."

Scragg accordingly sauntered out into the garden, and when the police came up he was carelessly leaning over the gate.

"Good mornin', Sergeant Blobbs," he said pleasantly, as they approached; "anything I could do for you?"

"Yes, Mr. Scragg; you will allow us to search your house, please; here's the warrant. Suspicion has fallen on you about the burglary at the school last night. If you are innocent you have nothing to fear, and will let us look everywhere."

Scragg let his jaw fall and put up his hands in astonishment. "Wot! 'Ow's that?" he exclaimed. "*Me* suspected, *me* a *h*onest market gardener. Wot d'yer mean?"

"I mean just what I say," said the ser-

geant. "Now, my good man, stand aside, please, and let us enter. And don't try to run away, either."

"Run away! Run away! Oo's goin' to run away? Not me! Wot! Wy should I run away?" and he fairly blazed with indignation. Then in a moment he changed his manner to one of icy politeness. "Come in, Mr. Sergint; come in, *come in*. Yer welcome to look where you like, and to do wot you like. Don't mind Snorty an' me; wy, bless yer, we're glad to see you, we are. Feelin' dull after that little weddin', we were. Pretty little weddin', too, pretty as I see. 'Ere, Snorty, bring some chairs, for the gen'lemen must be tired after their long walk. Come all the way from Downton, Snorty, they 'as, 'cos suspicion 'as fallen on *hus*. Ha! ha! ha!"

One constable stood outside whilst the others searched the house. Scragg was most polite, and laboriously pointed out to them nooks and corners in which things might be hid.

"'Ere, Sergint, 'ere's a mouse-hole," he said, after they had searched most carefully in one room; "wouldn't you like to dig un out an' see whether we've secreted any-

thing there? Snorty, bring the spaid. No, thanks? All right, Mr. Sergint, if you'd rather not."

Another time it was: "Ho, Mr. Sergint, yer ain't put yer finger in that 'ere crack; p'raps there's a dimond tiary there."

Meanwhile Snorty stood by and snorted, and his snorts were expressive of various fine shades of indignation and scorn.

The police searched most carefully; they ransacked every room, tapped the walls and the floors, opened cupboards, turned over mattresses, emptied drawers and bags, but could find nothing that in the smallest degree pointed to Scragg's complicity in any crime. It was just the house of an honest market gardener, no more, no less. No burglars' tools, no sand-shoes, no stolen property, nothing in the smallest degree suspicious. A search followed in the garden, the piggery, and outhouses, and even the well and small pond were dragged with irons brought for the purpose. The result was the same.

Scragg became more painfully polite, and Snorty's snorts more expressive as the moments went by. At last, after about three hours, the sergeant called upon his men to leave, having accomplished nothing.

"Will you and your boy come with us, though, please, Mr. Scragg?" he said. "There is just one other matter which we must look into."

"Oh, cer-tain-ly! Anything to oblige, as the helefunt said when the 'edge'og axed 'im to dance a 'ornpipe. But wait a bit, Sergint, please. Snorty, put the kettle on, an' we'll 'ave tea. 'Ot work this yere searchin' must be; 'ard work for a man of yer build, Mr. Sergint. Wot! Won't 'ave no tea! Sorry can't offer yer a glass of beer. Snorty an' me's tee-to-tallers, never touched a bottle, we 'aven't, since we were babbies—'ave we, Snorty?"

So he rattled on. The sergeant took little notice of him, but carried him and Snorty off to the school.

Arrived there he called the Doctor and Mr. Parrett, and they all went together to compare the size of Scragg's and Snorty's feet with the footmarks under the wall. Here, again, there was disappointment for the sergeant; Scragg's boot nothing like filled up the larger footmark, and Snorty's was far too big for the smaller.

"Tell him to take his boot off," whispered Mr. Parrett to the sergeant.

The sergeant took the hint, and asked Snorty to remove his boot.

Snorty demurred. "Wot's the use o' that?" he asked surlily; "and where's your warrant to remove my boot?"

"Aye, where, indeed?" said Scragg. "Besides, he isn't married, and 'as tremenjous big 'oles in 'is stockings, 'e 'as."

The sergeant persisted in his order being carried out, and Snorty was at last forced to take off one boot. The foot brought to light was small, slender, and white, in great contrast to the heavy, clumsy boot that ordinarily hid it.

"You wear very big boots," said the sergeant, with a quick, suspicious glance.

"Aye, and *I* pays for 'em," said Scragg snappishly; "so it's no one else's business if Snorty likes to wear big boots. 'E's dreadful fear'd of corns, 'e is, and won't wear smaller boots. Bit of a fool is Snorty, but faithful an' *h*onest!—like a dawg 'e is. Pity some folks ain't like 'im. I'd rather 'ave a *h*onest boy and a bit stoopid than folks who is so mighty clever," and he darted a venomous glance at Mr. Parrett, whose whisper he had heard. Snorty's foot was very much more the shape and size of the sand-shoe

mark, being only a trifle smaller in each direction.

This, however, was the only suspicious circumstance that could be brought to light, and as there was no direct proof forthcoming to warrant Scragg and Snorty being taken into custody, they were allowed to go free.

"Snorty an' me was goin' to town to-night on business," said Scragg. "I s'pose now we'd better stop, else more 'suspicion' may fall on us, eh, Sergint?"

"Yes, I think you had better stay," replied the sergeant. "As I said before, if you are innocent you have nothing to fear, and if your business isn't very particular, I'd advise you to stay until this matter is through."

"Innercent! Of course we are! We'll stay, and if you like, Mr. Blencher can stay and watch our movements. 'E's a nice man is Mr. Blencher, and 'asn't a nasty suspicious mind."

The sergeant consulted with the other constables, and then he said: "I think that's a good idea, Scragg——"

"Mr. Scragg, if you please, Sergeant."

"*Mr.* Scragg, then. It will stand in your

favour if a constable stays with you for a day or two, to keep an eye on you. But we'll make it Briggs as well as Blencher, then one can watch each of you."

Scragg had his own little plan in asking that Blencher might stay with them. It was a piece of bluff. He and Snorty, as is quite evident to the reader, had planned and successfully carried out the burglary, but, fortunately for themselves, they had hidden the booty, together with their tools and their burglar foot-gear, in a hiding-place which they had used before. Now that suspicion had fallen upon them, Scragg, for certain particular reasons, wished to change this hiding-place. He meant to do this in spite of Blencher being with him. The addition of Briggs to their company did not suit his plans, but still he could not very well demur, and so it was decided that Briggs and Blencher should go with him and Snorty and spend the night at the cottage.

Blencher was not at all anxious to spend the night away from his comfortable little home, and made some objections about not having had his "tay."

"Oh, that's all right, gentlemen," said Scragg, genially and magnanimously; "I'll

feed yer. Never you fear, Mr. Blencher. You'll get yer 'tay,' both on you, dacent and respectable. We don't bear no ill-will. We want to do all we can to make it nice and easy for these gents; and besides, we don't 'ave the honour of a couple of full-growed Bobbies to stay with us every night, do we, Snorty?"

CHAPTER XVII

BRIGGS AND BLENCHER

BRIGGS was a very different individual from Blencher. He was tall and thin, with a keen, ferret-like face, and had all his wits about him, and he meant to keep a sharp look-out on the two suspects. This he found no difficult matter, for Scragg went out of his way to invite the two policemen to keep an eye on their every movement.

"Come now, Mr. Briggs," he said, soon after they got home, "it's half-past four; time to feed the pigs, and then to shut up the hens. You come with me, please, and see I don't throw no pearls in the pig-wash, nor feed the bantams with no dimond necklaces, and Mr. Blencher can stay and see Snorty get the 'tay.' We ain't got nothing to 'ide, and are quite pleased to have such nice gents stayin' with us, ain't we, Snorty?"

After tea, as it was a bit chilly, the fire was

kept up in the kitchen, and they all sat round it and smoked, and Scragg made himself very pleasant, telling stories of London life in the most genial and friendly way. About eight o'clock he proposed a drop of beer. "I 'appen to 'ave got a little bill in for vegetables lately, and I'll stand treat."

He bustled round a bit and got down two big jugs, wiped them out, and then said, "'Ere, Mr. Briggs, if ye don' mind, ye might go with Snorty to the 'Blue Magpie,' and carry this lantern while he carries the jugs. It ain't more than a quarter of a mile away. Please see that the burglarious young imp don't 'ave no evil communications with the pot-boy. Mr. Blencher can stay and look after me."

P.C. Briggs gave Blencher an expressive look, meaning that he should keep a sharp watch on Scragg until his return, then he got his helmet and sauntered out with Snorty. He kept that young man in sight all the time, and gave him no chance of "evil communications."

They came back in about twenty minutes, Snorty carrying the two jugs very carefully, and Briggs following with the lamp. Scragg heard them coming, went to the door, opened

it and, meeting Snorty on the garden path, took one of the jugs from him and carried it into the kitchen. If any one had been near him, as neither Briggs nor Blencher was, he would have seen that just before he entered the kitchen again he emptied the contents of a little paper packet which he held in his hand into one of the jugs, which he then set on the mantelpiece.

"Come in, come in, Mr. Briggs," he said; "sorry to have troubled you to go out, but a drop of beer'll go down well. Sit down. Give me the jug, Snorty, and you get the glasses; there are just four."

Snorty got down the glasses, of the thick, mottled variety, and put them on the table. Scragg then took the jug down from the mantelpiece and poured out two brimming glasses, which he handed to Briggs and Blencher. From the other jug he poured out glasses for himself and Snorty. Then, before he seated himself again, he said: "I 'ave a little extry-speshul baccy upstairs. If Mr. Blencher will come with me, and bring the lamp, I'll get it, and you, Snorty, get that 'arf-bottle o' gin from the cupboard; p'raps the gents 'ud like a drop in their beer."

He and Blencher went upstairs, and Snorty

turned away to the cupboard. Quietly and quickly Briggs rose and, taking up his glass, changed it for Scragg's. He was no fool, and though he had not seen Scragg empty the little paper packet into the jug, he saw the paper flutter down from Scragg's hand on to the garden path. Before he had come in he had picked it up and examined it by the light of the lamp he held in his hand. It was not quite empty, for in one corner of it there was a small quantity of grey powder. Briggs had folded it up quickly and put it into his pocket, and had then come into the kitchen. He had immediately guessed that Scragg had drugged the beer, and had had his suspicions strengthened by seeing that he poured his own and Snorty's share from one jug, whilst he had helped Blencher and himself from the other. He had not yet determined how to proceed when Scragg's going upstairs with Blencher had given him the chance he wanted, and he had effected the change of glasses. He had not had time to change Blencher's glass for Snorty's, but he comforted himself with the reflection that it would not matter much whether Blencher were drugged or not, for in either case his sleep would be equally heavy.

Snorty set the half bottle of gin on the table, and Scragg and Blencher tramped down the stairs, the former with the tobacco.

When they had sat down again Scragg filled up Blencher's pipe with the "extry-speshul," and then handed the tobacco on to Briggs, who also took a pipeful. Briggs noticed, however, that Scragg filled up his pipe, not from the extra-special, but from the tobacco he was smoking before, and, therefore, after only one whiff at his pipe, he laid it down and smoked no more. This was fortunate for Briggs, because Scragg, to make assurance doubly sure, had not only drugged the beer, but had also brought some cunningly drugged tobacco, which he always kept by him for some such emergency as this.

Blencher smoked away in peace and comfort and drank his beer, and Briggs was very sorry for him as he thought of the head he would probably have on the morrow. He took up his own glass and quaffed it at a draught, after he had nodded over to Scragg and said, "Your health, Mr. Scragg, and may your innocence be speedily established."

"Thank you, Mr. Briggs, same to you—no; I mean, may you sleep safe and sound."

Very soon after this Blencher began to show signs of great drowsiness, and Briggs pretended to be very sleepy too, and when he saw Blencher, unable to sit up any longer, put his arms on the back of his chair, and resting his head on them, go fast asleep, he also, as though quite overcome, put his head on the table and started snoring heavily.

Soon afterwards he heard Scragg rise and go softly into the other room. Then Snorty also got up and went out. He raised his head and listened intently, and heard Scragg say, in a low tone, "They two bobbies are all right for a few hours; that stuff that Injun juggler giv' me will maike them sleep heavy as lead till mornin'. Now, Snorty, ye must taike the lantern, and find yer way down to the beach. There's a good moon, and ye must hide the swag somewhere else. I'm afraid Parritt's in this, and 'e's bound to twig, if he thinks long enough, that ye were after summat that day 'e see yer lookin' for 'shrimps.' Taike a spade with ye, and dig a 'ole at the bottom of the cliff farther out, where the tide comes up, and bury everything there. It'll be low water now. The water's bound to soak thro' when it comes up, and to spile some of our things, but it'll cover up the

traices, and when this 'as blowed over we'll be able to get the things up again all right. Mark right well where ye bury the stuff "—here Scragg yawned most violently—" I'll stop 'ere and watch the bobbies ; yus, and keep 'em asleep a bit longer if they need it. I've still got that yere chloriform. But I'm feelin' blaime sleepy myself, and I'll just stretch out on two chairs in the kitchen and taike forty winks."

So saying, Scragg returned to the kitchen, and in two minutes was as fast asleep as Blencher really was and as Briggs was pretending to be.

Snorty's preparations for going out were soon made, and, taking a dark lantern with him, he slipped out of the house without a sound and made for the beach.

Briggs lost no time in following him. The night was clear and there was a good moon, so that the policeman, dodging and crouching behind bushes and hedges, was able to keep Snorty in sight until he came to the cliffs. Here Snorty stopped and looked all round. The policeman narrowly escaped detection, for, in the noiseless boots he was wearing, he had been able to keep fairly close to Snorty. He just had time to crouch down behind a

rock before Snorty's glance came round to where he was.

Seeing and hearing nothing Snorty turned down the little path Mr. Parrett and the boys had followed on the occasion already described, and began making his way rapidly and noiselessly down the cliffs. Briggs here found great difficulty in following him without being observed, but by very careful stepping he managed to get down the first part of the cliffs, which was soft and grassy, and then, bearing to the left, he came to a rock which jutted out from the cliffs and overhung the stretch of sand about fifty feet beneath. By scrambling out to the top of this and hanging over he was just able to see the whole of the tiny bay shut in by the cliffs, but on to which the moon was directly shining. He saw that Snorty was already busy at work. He was digging with all his might, but after a few moments stopped and began in another spot some distance away. After digging to a good depth he returned to the other hole and started digging there again. Then he stopped work, threw down his spade, and pulled some sort of bag out of the hole which he had been digging. Then the constable was very much surprised to see

that two men suddenly sprang from behind a rock and rushed upon him. Snorty saw them coming, jumped towards the spade, picked it up, and lunged with it viciously at the foremost. The latter was just able to spring aside, but, in doing so, for a moment hampered the other. In a trice Snorty had dashed past them, and was scrambling up the path by which he had descended.

"Now's my time," thought the policeman, and, climbing down from the rock on which he was, he hastened as fast as he could towards the path. He was, however, just too late, for, as he approached the path, he saw a flying figure passing up it. He made a spring, and caught the bottom of a jacket, but with a clever wrench the fugitive got free, and the constable, overbalancing himself, fell full length across the path. The path just there took a sudden turn and was in deep shadow, and before he could pick himself up some one came running up round the corner, and with a shout of, "Now we have him!" threw himself on top of the unfortunate policeman. A moment later some one else came panting up the path, and went to the aid of his companion.

P.C. Briggs made a desperate resistance, but

one of the two on top of him evidently knew something of angles and jiu-jitsu, and in two or three minutes he was lying helpless on his face, with his arms twisted by one man into a kind of painful knot behind him, while the other sat on his legs.

His two assailants had time and opportunity to examine their captive, and one of them exclaimed in a tone of great astonishment, "Great goodness, it's a policeman!"

"Yes, it is," said P.C. Briggs, rather huffily. "Who in the world did you think it was?"

"We thought it was the young burglar called Snorty."

The two relaxed their hold, and Briggs stood up again, pulled himself straight, and picked up his helmet, which had rolled away to a distance of several feet. When he had done these things he had regained his ruffled dignity and his wind.

"The young burglar called Snorty," he replied with asperity, "ran up that path two or three minutes ago, and I just missed catching him."

"But where in the name of goodness did you spring from?"

"Why, I've been following that young blade

for the last half-hour, and if you two gents hadn't jumped on me like that I'd have been a good deal nearer to him than I am now. There's no knowing where he's got to by this time."

To explain this situation we must go back to Mr. Parrett. Dr. Taylor had been satisfied with the efforts of the local police, and, with the clues they had, he thought they would probably be able to catch the burglars. Therefore he had not, as Mr. Parrett had hoped he would, sent for a detective.

Mr. Parrett was anxious to see the matter cleared up; not that he wanted to see Scragg in the hands of the police, but that he felt that such dangerous characters as the burglars had proved themselves to be should be prevented from doing any more mischief to society. Besides, he was one who did not like to be beaten in any enterprise on which he had embarked. He had not been deeply impressed by the efficiency of the local police, and considered that, unless they received some help, they would not be likely to recover the missing wedding presents.

After the police had gone away in the evening he had again gone into the lane, to see whether he had missed any further clue in his

search in the morning. It was no use looking for the footmarks again, for the lane had had several people up and down it during the day. However, he went to the spot where he had lost the footmarks in the morning, and examined the ditch and the bank on the other side of it more carefully than he had before done. Some yards farther up the lane he at last discovered the faint impress of a sand-shoe on the opposite bank of the ditch ; this was just opposite a break in the hedge, and, scrambling through this, he hunted up and down, with the idea that the burglars might have hidden their booty in some rabbit-hole near the hedge. He could find nothing, however, and beyond the fact that there was a small pond in the field, in which they might have sunk their plunder, there was no clue whatever as to what the burglars had done. After hunting about for some time he was forced to content himself with the determination that on the morrow the police should drag that pond ; then he went back to the school to tea.

After tea he was sitting with his friend, Mr. Pearson, in the masters' room. Mr. Parrett was reading and Mr. Pearson was correcting some exercises for the next day.

They had been silent for some time when Mr. Parrett startled Mr. Pearson by exclaiming suddenly, "Shrimps!"

"Where?" asked Mr. Pearson hurriedly, pretending to look under the table. "Do they bite?"

"No, it's only an association of ideas. I was reading about a lunch, in which lobster salad was a prominent dish, and that suggested shrimps and the place where Scragg has hidden his swag."

"I can't say that the association of ideas is clear."

"No, but it will be when I have told you something."

Forthwith Mr. Parrett told his friend of the meeting with Snorty on the beach some weeks before.

"I can't think how it is that I have not thought of it before. That cove is evidently the place where they hide their plunder. Get your hat on, my dear fellow, and bring a good stick along. We must go and explore to-night. They may change their hiding-place before to-morrow."

"But the police are with them to-night."

"Yes, I know, but I don't trust much to the police. Scragg and Snorty are too

clever for Briggs and Blencher, I am afraid."

"Well, it's moonlight, and I don't mind a stroll if you don't take me to too break-neck a place."

Accordingly the two masters set out and made their way to the little cove, the memory of whose existence had just flashed into Mr. Parrett's mind.

Mr. Parrett went to the gardener's lodge before they set out, and, much to the wonder of the gardener, borrowed a spade, which he shouldered and carried off with him.

The two masters got down to the bottom of the path fairly easily, and Mr. Parrett was about to begin digging operations, when they heard a slight sound above them. They listened; somebody was coming down the path.

"Let's hide," whispered Mr. Parrett, and they quietly withdrew into a small cave, which the sea had washed out of the rock on their side of the cove. Hardly had they hidden themselves when they saw a youth, also carrying a spade, jump down on to the beach, and make for the dry sand at the end of the cove. Had it been daylight he must have noticed the newly-formed footmarks in

the sand, but he seemed to have no suspicions, and, almost without looking round, set to work to dig in the sands. He was evidently not sure of the exact spot, and after digging for a time he snorted impatiently, and began digging some distance away. Having made a deep hole, he returned to his former task, and after a time his labours were rewarded by his finding a bulging bag in the hole he had made. As he knelt down to examine it Parrett had whispered to Pearson, "Now!" and they had both sprung towards Snorty.

We have already seen what happened, and the result of the chase up the path leading out of the cove.

We left P.C. Briggs and Messrs. Pearson and Parrett looking at one another in astonishment and explaining matters. This took up another minute or two, and then the constable said:

"But now, where's that young thief got to? We'd better follow him up sharp."

"Well," said Mr. Parrett, "we had better go back to pick up the booty whilst you go on after Snorty. He will be almost sure to try to warn Scragg."

"Oh, Scragg is all right; he's drugged

himself by mistake instead of me. He and Blencher will be dead asleep for some hours yet. But I'm off after that young blackguard Snorty."

So saying, P.C. Briggs made what haste he could up the path, and Parrett and Pearson went down again to the cove to get the bag and the spades. They approached the hole which Snorty had dug, but no bag could they find. It had entirely disappeared. Snorty's spade was there, and their own spade was in the cave where they had left it. They hunted up and down the cove, and searched such parts of the lower cliff as were accessible, but eventually they had to give up the search as useless, and made their way to Scragg's cottage. As they went they had time to discuss the mystery of the disappearance of the bag.

"I see what it is," said Mr. Parrett; "whilst we were fighting P.C. Briggs, and setting matters right afterwards, that little limb must have doubled back, got the bag, crept past us again somehow, and got clear off."

"Perhaps that is it," answered Pearson; "there was just time for him to do it, but it was a daring thing to do."

"Probably, too, he knew of some other path leading from the cove, and took that. He knows the place well, you may be sure of that."

Mr. Parrett's supposition was correct. Snorty had looked back, and seen the assault upon the policeman, and, springing down from rock to rock, had got very quickly to the beach and picked up the bag, and, choosing a shorter but more dangerous path, had got to the top of the cliffs well before Briggs had arrived there, for on the way up the latter had lost his path and, coming to a cul-de-sac, had had to retrace his steps. Snorty, finding that the sack impeded him too much, untied it as he ran, picked out some of the smaller and more valuable things, pocketed them, and then slung the bag into a shallow pool which he passed.

He was a fleet runner, and, getting to the cottage well before Briggs, had done all he could to awaken Scragg, but that gentleman, thanks to the strength of the drugs which he had got from the Indian juggler, was too sound asleep to be awakened, and Snorty had had, reluctantly, to leave him to his fate. He was a faithful boy, as Scragg had said, "wonderful faithful," but he did not quite

see how his presence in gaol would help his master much, and so, hastily gathering together a few of his things, he put them into a small bag and slipped through a hole in the orchard hedge as P.C. Briggs, panting hard, and with a bad stitch in his side, entered the garden gate. Finding no trace of Snorty, Briggs searched his fellow's pockets, and finding a pair of hand-cuffs there, slipped them over Scragg's wrists, and then, looking about for a piece of rope, tied up his legs in a very neat and scientific manner. Having done this to his entire satisfaction, he sat down and picked up his pipe, which was still on the table, and began to think hard as to what should next be done. Finding his pipe filled, he abstractedly lit it and puffed away, without calling to mind that it was drugged. The consequence of this was that, when Parrett and Pearson entered the cottage half an hour later, they found Scragg scientifically tied up, and he and Briggs and Blencher as dead asleep as though they had been drinking very excessively.

They went out to the stable and harnessed Scragg's old horse to his manure cart. After much trouble they managed to rouse Briggs sufficiently to help them in getting Scragg

into the cart, but finding that he was inclined to sleep again, they bundled him in also by the side of Scragg, and drove the horse into Downton, leaving Blencher to recover from the effects of the drug as best he might.

The sergeant at Downton was very much astonished at about three a.m. to have delivered to him from a manure cart, firstly, Scragg, hand-cuffed, bound, and drugged, and secondly, his best policeman, also drugged and unable to rouse himself. Pearson and Parrett told their story, and the sergeant thought that it quite justified him in keeping Scragg in custody. When Briggs was able at last to tell his story, the sergeant had no doubts about his duty, and so, when Scragg woke up next morning, in a very confused and dazed condition, he was very unpleasantly surprised to find himself in a cell at Downton Police Station instead of in his own little cottage at home.

Meanwhile, Snorty had got a clear start, and made the best use of it. Getting to a line of railway some distance from Downton, he followed it up till he came to a station, then changed his clothes, and about dawn reached London, getting clear of the terminus

at which he had landed just as the police there got a telegram from Downton asking them to watch all trains from a certain direction, and to stop any young man who might answer to the description they gave.

Scragg was in due time tried, and committed to the Sessions. The bit of evidence which was needed to settle his fate was found on the day following the events just recorded. Part of the sack which Snorty had thrown into the small pond was sticking up above the surface, and it was seen by one of a small search-party, led by Mr. Parrett, which spent the day in looking for the missing sack. In it a number of the gifts was found, and among them a small silver mirror, which on its face bore the distinct impress of Scragg's thumb. No Blencher was about this time to superimpose his own fat, broad thumb upon it, and it settled Scragg's fate. Whilst he was in gaol waiting for his trial, suspicion fell upon him of having been implicated in other burglaries, and eventually he was sentenced to a term of penal servitude.

Mr. Parrett was very sorry that it should come to this. He had really liked Scragg, and had hoped that he might eventually become a strong, good man. But Scragg had

chosen a crooked way of getting money in preference to the straight path of hard work and honesty, and it had led him to ruin.

When he had brought off this burglary, as he had thought successfully, he had determined that it should be his last. He would now settle down to an honest life, marry, and live happily and well ever afterwards. His determination came too late, and he lost everything that he had hoped for. Sin is a hard taskmaster, but punctually pays his wages—sorrow, suffering, and death.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE DORMITORY MASTER OF ARTS

NOW to go back to Polson. After Dr. Taylor had finished with him Mr. Parrett took him and had a very serious talk with him. He tried to win his confidence, and to show him the inevitable end of the path he had been so far following.

Polson was for the time really impressed, and gave a very solemn promise that he would turn over a new leaf. No more lying, no more stealing, no more meanness of any sort. He had been thoroughly cowed and frightened, and was ready to promise anything. And he promised, too, not with many protestations, but in a low, earnest voice that sounded tc Mr. Parrett real and truthful.

This was the beginning of a talk, straight, manly, and simple, a talk in which Mr. Parrett was at his best, a talk in which he made Polson feel that religion was a real,

practical thing, meant by God for everyday life ; yes, even the life of a schoolboy.

Polson really resolved to do better in future. But there was one fatal fault here. He would not let himself think of confessing the lies which he had just told to the Doctor and Mr. Parrett, and so at the very beginning his good resolutions were marred and rendered worthless.

The first straight duty that lay before him was, then and there, to tell Mr. Parrett the whole truth about the scarf-pin, how he had offered it to Scragg, and how it had been Scragg's words, and not any repentance working in his own heart, which had led him to try to replace the pin. But Polson was not willing to make this confession ; his good resolutions soon passed away, and in a day or two he was very busy planning what further lies he should tell if Scragg revealed anything about him during the trial. As it happened, nothing about him did come out. We have seen that Scragg, at bottom, had a great deal of good in him, and as he saw nothing to be gained by dragging Polson into the matter, he had the grace to say nothing about him.

But until the Sessions were over Polson

had a very bad time. He was continually wondering whether Scragg would "split" on him, and, if so, how much he would say. Sometimes he feared that Scragg might try to implicate him in the burglary, and that in such a case the lies he had told to Dr. Taylor and Mr. Parrett would go against him, and he might really be convicted and sentenced to gaol. The fear of Scragg came between him and his work; even in play-time it sat heavy on his heart, and often at night he would wake up in a cold sweat, feeling the hand of a policeman on his shoulder. If Dr. Taylor or Mr. Parrett spoke to, or even looked at him, he thought he saw suspicion in their eyes.

However, the weeks passed by and nothing happened, and at last the Sessions were held at Downton. Of course, he was not able to be in the court, but how eagerly, and yet with what fear, he listened to all talk and rumour about the trial! A full account of the proceedings was in the local paper, and how anxiously Polson read every word, expecting to see something that would incriminate him. And how relieved he was at the last to read the sentence, and to hear that Scragg had been taken off to another prison.

Even then, however, for some weeks, the fear remained in his mind that Scragg might in prison say something about him.

But as the weeks rolled on and nothing happened Polson began to lose his fears, and with his fears his resolve to lead a better life also went. A good resolution, boys, that has its foundation merely on fear, is in a very parlous state; to be strong and firm and lasting, it must be on a strong and sure foundation—The Rock.

Polson's resolutions had no sure foundation, and he gradually fell back into his old ways of thinking and acting, and, because he had fallen back, was worse than before. Especially was this the case with regard to his feelings towards Mr. Parrett. For some time a feeling of respect for his master had been struggling with the old dislike. Mr. Parrett had been very good to him too, trying in all ways to help and encourage him, but the old hatred was only dozing, it was not killed, and it awoke again as soon as Polson ceased to try to be better. Now that the fear of Scragg was growing less he began to rebel against the punishment which Dr. Taylor had given him, and to think bitter thoughts of Mr. Parrett, who had been the one to find him out and to

bring this shame and unpleasantness into his life. Something that happened towards the end of the term fanned these embers of hate into a flame.

The Imps were fond, like many other boys at boarding school, of various kinds of sports indulged in after they were supposed to be safely in bed. Most of the boys in the Fourth Form slept in one dormitory, which was called the Long Room. They went off to bed about half-past eight, but very often not to sleep.

One favourite amusement, after the master on duty had turned down the gas and gone downstairs, was to get degrees. These degrees were obtained by performing deeds which involved a risk of detection—the more risk, the higher degree.

The Preparatory Cambridge was simply to run along the passage, and touch the door of another dormitory, and get back without detection. The Junior Cambridge took you to a point half-way down a flight of stairs, the Senior to the bottom of the flight, and so on. The highest degrees involved a considerable degree of risk.

It was a good deal more difficult for a boy to get the degree of Doctor of Divinity in the

Imps' University, than it is for an ambitious young minister to obtain it in some bogus American university. Before a boy could write D.D. after his name, he had to go, dressed in night costume, down three flights of stairs to the basement, out into the playground, take a turn on the giant-stride, and back upstairs, without being caught. The D. Litt. (Oxford) was to go into the Masters' Common Room, touch the table, and get back. This was a peculiarly difficult task, of course, for a candidate never knew when he started on his task whether he would find the Masters' room empty or not, and he ran all the risk of running full tilt into a master coming out of the room, or walking along the passage.

The candidate's task was made a little easier, certainly, by there being a little cloak-room opposite the masters' room door, in which he could hide until he knew how the land lay.

The M.A. involved much personal danger, and could only be attempted by a boy with a very steady head. The house in which Polson, Reynolds, and Co. were, had, on the level of each storey, a stone ledge jutting out about a foot from the outside wall.

This cornice ran from the bottom of one window to another window, and so went all round the house. A boy with a steady head could step on to this cornice, after getting out on the window-ledge, and could then, by flattening himself against the wall, and clinging to any little unevennesses in its surface, manage to shuffle along from one window to another. A boy had been known to go right round the house in this way, but he had been one who was absolutely fearless in such tricks, and active and light as a monkey. Thanks to that special providence which seems to watch over boys, no one had yet fallen from the ledge, but had any one done so it would have been to certain death.

One night after Mr. Parrett, who was on duty, had turned down the gas and gone downstairs, this form of amusement was suggested. It had its special risks on Mr. Parrett's night, for he was known to be so active and wideawake, but, because it was more risky, it had more charm for some of the Imps in the Long Room.

Polson, who at this time was trying to win back some little share of popularity, had already, on former occasions, gained several

of the diplomas, and he and Reynolds were rivals.

"I say, Polson," said Reynolds, "I bet you daren't try your M.A."

"No," answered Polson; "I can't do that, I always get giddy on high places, and should fall. I'm not a coward, but I don't see the use of killing myself for certain, just for the sake of a rotten M.A."

"A rotten M.A.!" chimed in Jackson. "I wish I had the pluck to get it."

"I'll go," said Smythe.

"So will I," said Reynolds.

"Bags' first turn," said Smythe.

"All right, go ahead," said Reynolds, who did not feel very sure of himself, and did not mind putting off the nerve-testing ordeal as long as he could.

"Well," said Polson, "if you get your M.A. I'll go in for the D.Litt."

Smythe got out on the window-ledge, balanced himself carefully, and, without much difficulty, for he had lots of nerve, got along to the first window, which was a passage one. This would have been enough to get him a bare M.A., but he wanted honours, and so started off again for the next window, which belonged to the next

dormitory. He reached this in safety, knocked at it, exchanged greetings with the inmates of the dormitory, and started back. He had just got to the end of his journey along the cornice, and was in the act of stepping on to the window-ledge, when he heard some one in the room cry, "Cave! Cave!" and the window shut just in front of him.

What had happened was this: one of the boys who had been keeping "cave" had heard a step on the stairs, and had run into the room, giving the warning cry. Polson had been standing looking out of the window, and, partly from mischief and partly out of thoughtlessness, had shut it. He did not like Smythe at all, and it had flashed into his mind that if the window were shut Smythe would not be able to get in quickly, and would most probably be caught, and get into trouble. He had not thought of the personal danger to Smythe in such an action as this.

Smythe was in the act of catching hold of the side of the window when it shut, and his fingers were badly nipped. He lost his hold and fell. He would have gone straight to the ground below, and been killed, had it not been for a very fortunate and providential

circumstance. There was a patent fire-escape kept on each storey. It had been invented by an old boy, and he had presented the school with several specimens. This fire-escape was a long asbestos tube, and needed a strong bar outside each window to which it might be fastened in time of fire. The window outside which Smythe stood had fortunately such a bar, and as he overbalanced himself, he fell partly on to it, and clutching at it with both hands, hung swinging over space. He held on firmly, and tried to pull himself on to the window-ledge, but found it difficult to do so.

The boys inside the room, meanwhile, oblivious of Smythe, and not knowing his danger, had hurried to their beds, so that, when Mr. Parrett came in, even Polson, who had been hindered by shutting the window, and was the last, had just slipped into bed.

Mr. Parrett came into the room and was walking down it, when suddenly a rather muffled cry of "Help! Help! Help!" was heard.

Every boy was startled, and held his breath, and again through the silence came the cry, "Help! Help!"

"It's Smythe, it's Smythe!" shouted Reynolds, and ran to the window.

He threw it up, leaned out, and saw Smythe's face a couple of feet below the ledge. Reynolds grasped his wrists just in time to prevent him from falling, for his hold was slipping.

"Help! help! sir," shouted Reynolds.

Mr. Parrett was already at the window, and, reaching out, got hold also of Smythe's wrists, and bracing himself against the wall pulled hard. Smythe got his foot on the window-ledge, and was soon inside, very white and scared, but safe.

"Whatever does this mean?" asked Mr. Parrett, when he and the others had somewhat recovered themselves. "Where do you come from, Smythe?"

"From outside, sir," stammered Smythe.

"Yes, yes; but what were you doing there?"

"I was trying to get my M.A., sir," replied Smythe, who hardly knew what he was saying.

Mr. Parrett stared at him—was the boy mad?

"Trying to get your M.A.? What *do* you mean?"

"It is a game we play, sir. If we can walk along the ledge outside to the next window and back, we get our M.A."

Mr. Parrett looked out of the window to see what was meant, and then exclaimed, "You little idiots! Do you mean to say, Smythe, that you have done that to-night?"

"Yes, sir."

"And how did you come to be hanging to that bar."

"Just as I got back, sir, I was stepping on to the window-ledge, and put out my hand to catch the side of the open window, when it shut, and I got my fingers caught, and fell on the bar."

"How did the window shut?"

"I don't know, sir. But some one must have shut it from inside."

"Who shut the window?"

No one answered.

At last some one said, "Polson, you were last at the window; didn't you shut it?"

Polson hesitated, and then said, "Well, perhaps I did. I was so confused by your coming, sir, I hardly know what I did; but I suppose I must have shut it."

"That does not sound a very plausible

statement. Do you really mean to say that you don't know whether you shut the window or not ? "

" No, sir ; and if I did it was only through confusion, and not with any intention of harming Smythe."

" Umph ! " said Mr. Parrett, and his snort, for suggestiveness, might have done credit to Snorty himself. " I suppose I must believe you, but it is difficult. But now to get back to the point. Smythe, has any one else ever attempted this mad feat ? "

" Yes, sir."

" Who ? "

" I had rather not say."

" Well, perhaps I ought not to press my question. Have any of you boys done this ridiculous thing ? "

One or two M.A.'s held up their hands, looking not at all happy over their past achievements.

" Well," said Mr. Parrett, " I must say that you boys have considerably more nerve than brains. I never heard of such a foolhardy trick. All the M.A.'s in this room must in play-time to-morrow walk fifty times along the top of the wall at the end of the paddock. I think I can get together enough M.A. gowns

to rig them out with one apiece. Perhaps that will cure them of their love of foolhardy feats. Meanwhile, I must report this matter to the Doctor, and I am pretty certain that he will make the offence of walking along that cornice in future one to be met only by expulsion. As for you, Polson, you had better stand on that window-sill now for an hour, and meditate on the folly of shutting a window in the face of a boy in such a dangerous position as Smythe was. A boy who, without knowing anything about it, can do such a thing is a dangerous customer, and must be taught to think. Your action tonight, coming on the top of Smythe's idiotic rashness, very nearly cost him his life. I can only hope that it was, as you say, purely unintentional."

Polson put a coat on, and had to stand on the window-sill for an hour, in a very uncomfortable position, and after Mr. Parrett had gone downstairs the boys "went for" him very strongly.

Next day there was, of course, a great row, and the Doctor threatened all sorts of things against any boy who in future should attempt such a rash deed as Smythe and others had been guilty of. He took a more effectual

way of preventing another such occurrence, by immediately having all the dormitory windows altered, so that no boy in future could possibly get out on the window-ledge. Thus that particular degree was denied to aspirants after fame, but I hear that nowadays another has been invented just as difficult and almost as dangerous!

CHAPTER XIX

POLSON BECOMES A D.LITT.

THINGS settled down again, and a few nights later one of the boys, Tims, said to Polson, "I say, Polson, you promised to try the D.Litt. the other night, but you haven't done it."

"I didn't promise," said Polson; "I said I would if Smythe got his M.A. He didn't get it, because he was caught in trying it."

"Oh, that's jolly mean, especially as it was your fault that he was caught."

"It wasn't."

"It was."

"It wasn't, I tell you. Smythe must have been caught anyhow. He couldn't have got into the room before Parrett came in."

"I could," said Smythe. "It was all your

fault that the whole thing was found out and stopped. If you hadn't shut the window I should have been in the room in a jiffy. I might not have been in bed when Parrett came in, but that wouldn't have mattered."

"That's so," said Tims. "I vote that as a punishment we make Polson take his D.Litt."

Polson protested; he did not want to risk any more rows, but the others were inexorable. He must that night become a Doctor of Literature.

"And mind you do it fairly," said Tims. "You're such a slippery fellow that there's no knowing whether you'll cheat or not."

"Perhaps you'd better come with me," said Polson maliciously.

"That's a good idea," said Reynolds. "Go on, Tim; we'll give you an honorary degree if you watch him and see that he goes into the masters' room. You needn't go in yourself. You've only got to hide somewhere and watch."

"All right," said Tims rather reluctantly. He went unwillingly, but did not like to refuse after having urged that Polson should go.

"It's almost too easy to-night," grumbled

another fellow. "Parrett and Pearson are out. Only young Jewel is in."

Parrett, Pearson, and Jewel were the three masters who lived in the headmaster's house.

"You'd better come too," said Polson.

"Oh, no! Too many cooks spoil the broth. I'd like to go when it's a trifle more difficult."

"No doubt!" sneered Polson.

"Don't let's waste any more time," said Reynolds. "Away you go, Polson. Tims will follow you."

Polson crept along the passage to the top of the stairs, but came flying back. Some one was coming upstairs.

Presently Mr. Jewel came in, had a look round, and then went on to visit other rooms. As soon as he had gone out Smythe exhorted Polson and Tims.

"Now's your time; quick, Polson; hurry up, Tims. Get downstairs whilst he's round the corner in the Square Room. Quick, man, quick! You can hide in the cloak-room after you've done the trick, and then slip up again when he goes into the masters' room."

"No fear," said Polson; "I'm not going now."

"Yes, man, yes; now's your chance!"

Polson thus exhorted, and not stopping to think further, jumped out of bed, put on his coat, and, finding that the passage was clear, made a bolt for it. Tims followed him. The stairs were also clear, and they began to run down the first flight which led to the lower dormitories. When about half way down they heard Mr. Jewel's footsteps in the passage above. They had now no alternative but to fly down as fast, but as silently as they could. The stairs wound round in large curves from the top of the house by three flights to the basement.

Tims was some little distance behind Polson, and was not quite at the bottom of the first flight, when Mr. Jewel began leisurely descending. He caught a glimpse of a figure in white whisking round to take the next flight.

"Who's that? Who's that?" he cried, and as there was no reply he bounded down the stairs in pursuit. He was young and active, and gained considerably on Tims, who was somewhat impeded by his nightshirt, which was too long for him. But Tims did not stop. Polson, having arrived at the bottom of the second flight, had taken the turn to the right,

along the passage which led to the cloak-room and the masters' room. Tims turned to the left towards the preparation room and the chemistry room. There was more room to run in that direction, and more places in which to hide.

Mr. Jewel was only a few yards behind now, but shot on into the preparation room, whilst Tims had been just far enough ahead to turn unseen into the passage which led to the chemistry room. The preparation room was dimly lighted, and Mrs. Stubbs, the lodge-keeper's wife, had just finished her work of sweeping, and was near the door ready to go home.

"Has a boy just come in here?" asked Mr. Jewel.

"No, sir; no boy ain't come in 'ere."

Mr. Jewel came out and turned down the passage. He hurriedly entered the chemistry room, and, as soon as he had gone in far enough, Tims, who was standing trembling just behind the door, stole round it, behind the master's back, and was off again down the passage. He did it quickly, and almost noiselessly, but Mr. Jewel heard him, turned, and again pursued.

Tims flew along the passage, but just as

he came to its end he had the evil fortune to run full tilt into the lodge-keeper's wife, who had now just begun leisurely to steer her way home, with her dust-pan, bucket, and brush in her hands. She was a good substantial body, and so great was the shock that she fell sprawling to the ground, her dust-pan neatly deposited its contents all over her head, and her bucket and broom flew in different directions with a horrible clanging and clatter.

Tims, on his part, sat down with great violence, and wondered for a moment whether he had run into an earthquake. Mr. Jewel was close behind and tripped over on top of him. Tims was on his feet again without much waste of time, and would have sprung off again, hoping, as the passage was not well lighted, that in the confusion he might not have been recognised. But Mrs. Stubbs put forth a restraining hand and grabbed him by the ankle. This time he was fairly caught, and Mr. Jewel in another moment had him by the arm.

"You, Tims! I thought I saw you two or three minutes ago in the Long Room."

"Y—e—e—s, sir."

"Well, what are you down here for? And

what do you mean by running from me in this unseemly way ? "

Mrs. Stubbs had now recovered herself and slowly risen. She was very angry and joined in the conversation in a high, rapid, scolding voice. " Yes, indeed, sir ; and what does you and that young varmint mean by running into me in that unseemling way ? And me so stiff and sore with the rheumatiz as never was. You've knocked all the breath out of me, you 'ave. You've sent my 'eart into my mouth that dreadful, and given me that palpertation, as I can't 'ardly speak. My ! what *air* we a coming to, I should like to know, when a poor, respectable workin'-'ooman can't go 'ome from er toil in the dead of night, but a tarin', rarin' schoolboy and a school-teacher must a come runnin' an' screechin' down *hall* the passages, and knock 'er out of bref and out of time, with *hall* 'er buckets and dust-pans and brooms and brushes bangin' and dangin' roun' 'er, and *hall* the dust she 'as gathered in the sweat of 'er eyebrow flyin' hall over er air and pusson like a Sahairy dessert. I won't 'ave it ; no, that I won't. I'll——"

Mrs. Stubbs had worked herself into such a temper that words failed her, and she tried

to get at Tims, but Mr. Jewel stopped her, and said in a soothing voice, "There, my good woman, there. Gently, gently, it's all right; you leave——"

But this only made the irate Mrs. Stubbs more angry. "Your good 'ooman; 'oo's your good 'ooman? Gently, gently! It's all right? Indeed! If a peck of dust had flowed into your back, and into your back hair, and between your pusson and your dress, till you felt like a thirsty barrow dessert, and if you'd wasted *hall* the sweat of your heyebrow in vanity, vanity, like that poor King Soliman, would it be all right? Leave, indeed! I won't leave till I've——" Here she tried again to get at Tims, and Jewel again had to interpose.

"No, I did not tell you to leave, Mrs. Stubbs. I said, 'Leave him to me,' I'll punish him. Besides, it was only an accident."

"Haxident, haxident! You punish him? And you in the game too! Why, you're as bad as the boy, runnin' and tarin' after 'im in the dark, and you a solemn and reverint school-teacher, as ought to walk about slow and proper, with diginty and digorum, like a nice tame pussy, as knows 'ow to be'ave

'erself, and not like a highty-tighty wild-cat that scratches your eyes out, and flies out of winder before you can say meow! Haxident! I'll haxident him!" and she raised a threatening fist.

"Mrs. Stubbs," said Mr. Jewel with dignity, "listen to me. I was not playing a game with this boy. I was trying to catch him in order to punish him for being out of bed. If you do not be quiet I shall have to report you to the Doctor."

"Report *me* to the Doctor! And what will I have to say, I'd like to know, when a schoolteacher comes flyin' thro' a dark passage, like a screechin' wild bat, and bangs 'isself *hand* a boy into the side of a respectable elderly female, who is just wayin' 'er wend 'omewards, after gatherin' dust in the sweat ——"

Mr. Jewel waited for no more; clutching Tims tightly by the collar, he hurried him off at a rather undignified rate towards the masters' room, leaving Mrs. Stubbs to recover her brush and dust-pan, her broom and temper as best she might.

Meanwhile, where was Polson? He had been considerably in front of Tims, and had taken, as we have seen, the turn to the

masters' room. The swing door between the boys' and the Doctor's quarters was shut, so was the door of the cloak-room, but the door of the masters' room was open, and the room itself empty. He turned in quickly, and, looking for a hiding-place, threw himself under a low, broad, old-fashioned sofa which stood against the wall, thinking that Tims and Mr. Jewel would immediately be after him. They, however, turned the other way, and not long after he heard the clang of Mrs. Stubbs's implements, as they flew over the stone passage, and then her voice raised in wrathful indignation. He could not tell what had happened, but realised that there was no possibility of escape yet. Presently Mr. Jewel entered the room rather hurriedly, and Polson heard the following conversation between him and Tims.

"Now, Tims, I want an explanation of this. What were you running downstairs for, just after I had seen you in the Long Room."

"I was just running downstairs."

"What for?"

"To get a degree, sir."

"What do you mean?"

"A Doctor of Philosophy, sir."

"Oh, this is again the same silly nonsense as Mr. Parrett found you boys practising in the Long Room the other night."

"Something like it, sir."

"What were you coming downstairs to do?"

"To watch some one into this room, sir."

"Some one into this room! Who?"

"I cannot say, sir."

"Oh, one of the masters, of course! What did you want to spy on us for?"

"I wasn't going to spy, sir."

"Well, that's what I call it. In any case I shall report you to the Doctor for a caning. All this playing about at night must be stopped. Now, just go up to bed."

Tims went, and there was silence in the masters' room. Polson lay very still, and tried not to breathe. Presently Mr. Jewel came and stretched himself on the very sofa under which Polson was lying, lit a pipe, and began to smoke. The smoke made Polson's throat tickle, and he very much wanted to cough, but managed somehow or other to restrain himself.

Presently Mr. Pearson and Mr. Parrett came in.

It is said that eavesdroppers never hear any good of themselves, and it was so on this occasion. Mr. Jewel told the other two the story of Tims's escapade, and they very much enjoyed his description of Mrs. Stubbs's outburst.

"What are you going to do?" asked Mr. Parrett; "report her to the Doctor?"

"No fear!" said Mr. Jewel; "it was rather rough on the old lady to be so suddenly upset as she was 'wayin' 'er wend 'omewards, in the dead of night,' and I don't wonder that she lost her wool a bit. I should have done so too under the circumstances. No, no; I'm not going to say anything about it. And I'm beginning to repent, too, about having told Tims that I should report him. After all it was nothing very dreadful, but I had been a bit ruffled by the Mrs. Stubbs's incident. Besides, he's a very decent little chap."

"Yes," said Mr. Pearson; "not like that little toad of a Polson. I *do* dislike that boy."

"Well," said Mr. Parrett, "I have been trying honestly to like that boy, and to help

him. My mother, God bless her, made me promise before I came to school that I would try to help the youngsters down on their luck, and the bad ones, and I always felt that Polson was one of the latter, and I really have done my best for him, but I am sure that he is not straight. If you talk with him he always seems to be keeping something back, and the other night when he shut the window in Smythe's face I am sure it was intentional."

What Mr. Parrett said about having tried his best to help Polson was quite true. After his first two or three experiences with the boy he found himself absolutely disliking and despising him. This was quite natural, but he could not feel that it was right. He had high ideas about his duty to the boys under his charge, and he often recalled and thought about his promise to his mother. He found it impossible to change his feelings about Polson until he had prayed about him and for him; then his feelings had changed, and he had only wished to help the boy, and, if possible, make him into a man. He had tried in many ways to get hold of him, but so far, as we have seen, with no satisfactory result.

"I am sure," said Mr. Pearson, "he is capable of such a thing. I thoroughly distrust him."

"Well, I can't say that I feel his word is worth much, but I pity the boy. His mother's dead, and his father is a bad lot, if all the stories told about him are true. He is one of these financiers and company promoters, and he doesn't mind how he gets rich, nor how many people he ruins, so long as he keeps just within the law."

"By the by, that's a coincidence," said Mr. Jewel; "have you seen *Veracity* this week? It seems that old Polson is home from Africa now, arrived a few weeks ago, and he has been doing the heavy beneficent business: £1000 to this charity, £500 to that hospital, and so on. *Veracity* says it is a thanks-offering for the success of some particularly clever trick he has brought off at the Rand lately. It gives all details; and certainly the old boy does, in money matters, sail particularly close to the wind. I should think, though, he will bring a libel action against *Veracity*."

"Oh, no," said Mr. Pearson; "I don't expect he will. *Veracity* has its facts before it publishes anything like that. It's a pity they

can't put men like that in gaol. They do more harm than a thousand burglars like poor Scragg."

"Well, you know," said Mr. Parrett; "I am inclined sometimes to agree with what poor old Scragg once said to me, 'The law! I 'aven't got much use for the law!' I don't think you fellows have ever heard of my father's case. No? Well, I'll tell you. He had a very good position in a big bank in London, but through the treachery of one of his bank friends, he came under suspicion for fraud and forgery, and was arrested. He was convicted on what always seemed to his friends very insufficient evidence, and sentenced to five years' imprisonment. He was actually in prison for four years, and then the real culprit, who was dying, made a confession of his guilt. The whole matter was gone into again, my father's name and fame were entirely cleared, he was released, and the papers announced that a terrible mistake had been made. But no public reparation was made to him by Government. The bank, however, acted honourably, and tried, as far as it was able, to undo the wrong that had been committed, and gave him again his old position of trust. But the anxiety, hardships,

and shame of his years in prison had broken his constitution, and he died in what ought to have been the prime of his manhood. But notwithstanding all the trouble and shame of it, what struck me, though I was only a child then, was the brave patience with which he and my mother bore the sore trial. My father never lost courage, but held up his head through it all, and though his body was enfeebled, his spirit remained unbroken. My mother, God bless her, was ever so patient. Sometimes, I remember, she would break down at the thought of all the wrong and injustice we were suffering, but at the worst of times she was quite sure that some day, in God's own way, my father's innocence would be established. That was the most wonderful part of it. Neither of them lost trust in God's goodness, nor grew hard or bitter. They did not pretend to understand it all, but they clung to the faith that somehow, sometime, God would bring His own good out of all the evil."

Mr. Jewel and Mr. Pearson were very quiet for some moments, then Mr. Pearson said, softly, "Thanks for trusting us with the story, Parrett. What an awful trial to go through, and what pluck your people must

have had! I should like to meet your mother."

"So should I," said Jewel.

"Well, I hope you will some day. She's the best and pluckiest mother that ever was! But I say, you fellows, I needn't ask you to say nothing about this. You can understand, and won't think any the worse of me for what I have told you ——"

"I should think not!" exclaimed both his friends.

"Yes; but you're different from a good many others. Most folks think the mere fact of my father having been in prison, though absolutely innocent, a good enough reason for treating us like criminals. Both the Chairman and the Secretary of the Board of Governors knew my father well, and all about his awful experience, but I doubt whether they said anything about it to the other Governors, as with some of them I am sure it would have gone powerfully against me."

"What a beastly shame!" said Pearson; "and what humbug it is that, on the other hand, men like old Polson should go flourishing about, with their donations and sub-

scriptions, as benefactors to the human race!"

"Yes," replied Mr. Parrett; "but I would infinitely rather have had an honest father like mine, with all his hard luck, than a father like Polson's, who, though he may be as rich as Crœsus, has precious little conscience. I pity the boy—if he had had a better father he would have been a better boy. But, to change the conversation, will you listen to a history paper, Pearson, that I have set for the Fourth, and tell me what you think of it."

Mr. Parrett proceeded to get out a history examination paper, and read it to Mr. Pearson. They discussed various points in it, and Mr. Parrett made one or two changes.

Soon after this their supper bell rang, and the three masters went out of the room without having discovered that Polson was under the sofa. It may be imagined that his feelings had not been pleasant ones. He had not dared to move or make a sound, and he had thus become very cramped and stiff, and the pins and needles in one arm had been awful. When the masters had gone he came out of his hiding-place, and going to the door looked up and down the passage. No one was in

sight. He returned to the table, looked through the history paper, even made one or two notes on a scrap of paper, and then ran out of the room, along the passage, upstairs, and got safely to his bedroom.

He flung the door open, walked in with a heavy tread, and trying to imitate Mr. Jewel's voice cried, "Have any of you boys seen that young rascal Polson?"

CHAPTER XX

THE WORST KIND OF LIE

SOME of the boys were already asleep, but many were still awake, and as soon as Polson came in, a storm of questions greeted him.

"Where have you been all this time?"

"What have you been doing?"

"Were you caught?"

"Did you get your D.Litt.?"

"Did you see what happened to Tims?"

Such were some of the questions hurled at him.

"Oh, give us a chance!" said Polson. He was a vain lad, and was enjoying the sensation that his coming had caused. "Before I tell you you must all swear *faithfully* that you will *never* let out what I am going to say, and never tell anything about what I have done."

"Of course we won't," said Reynolds, "we're not sneaks."

"No," said Polson; "that won't do. Before I say a word every fellow in the room must give me his promise. This thing would be too serious for me if it got out."

"All right," said Reynolds impatiently. "I say, you fellows, who are awake, wake any chaps you can reach who happen to be asleep. I expect it will be a mare's nest, but still it may be something worth hearing."

"All right, then," said Polson sulkily; "if that's what you say I won't tell you anything. Good night." He got into bed and settled himself for sleep.

"Oh, never mind Reynolds!" said one of the boys, whose curiosity had quite got the better of him; "we'll all promise, and then you fire ahead."

Polson was really only too glad to be persuaded, and when every boy in the room had made a very faithful promise not to tell, he began, "Whilst that young juggins, Tims, was being followed and caught by Jewel——"

"Here, Polson, don't you go calling me names; if you'd had a beastly long night-shirt that kept on tripping you up you wouldn't have got down so quickly."

"If you fellows are going to interrupt just as you like I won't go on."

"Shut up, Tims!" shouted some one; "you always are a juggins; it isn't your fault, you were made so; fire away, Polson."

"As I was saying, whilst that little chucklehead, Tims, was being caught by Jewie, I got safely down to the masters' room and hid under the sofa. Presently there was an awful row in one of the passages, and after a while in comes Jewie, solemn as an owl, leading Tims, looking like a sucking-pig——"

"Shut up, Polson——" began Tims, but was promptly silenced by a pillow applied to his face and held there by a boy in the next bed.

"——leading Tims, looking like a stuck sucking-pig, as I said before. Well, then, Tims went on to explain awfully sheepishly to Jewie how he was trying to become a Doctor of Philosophy, and Jewie got the idea that he had come down to spy upon the masters, and said he would report him to the Doctor. Then Tims was sent off upstairs, and after a bit Jewie came and sat right over me, and smoked a beastly strong pipe that nearly choked me. I daren't move a finger, and would have given anything to be able to cough, but of course couldn't do so. Then, after a time, in come

Pearson and Parrett, and they all begin jawing together. Jewie spins them the yarn of Mrs. Stubbs, which you have heard from Tims, I suppose."

"Yes, we don't want it again; go on."

"Well, they all laughed like mad, and Parrett asked whether he was going to report Mrs. Stubbs. Jewie said no, and he also said he was beginning to repent of threatening to report Tims, because Tims was such a soft-headed ninny that he didn't know half the time what he was doing."

"He didn't say that," said Tims.

"Oh, were you there? If so, you'd better tell the story yourself."

"No, no; go on, Polson," came a chorus of voices.

"Pearson and Parrett agreed to all that Jewie said about Tims, and then they began talking about other fellows. Smythe, they said, was not such a bad chap, but he thought such a lot of himself, and was always trying to be funny. Reynolds was the same, only more so, and so on. The only fellow whom they thought to be decent, although he didn't try to suck up to them, and pretend to be a saint, was Polson."

"Oh, yes, we all believe that!" said

the boys all together. "Tell us another, Polson!"

"Look here, you fellows! Were you there or was I? I'm telling you the truth, whether you believe it or not."

"But now comes *the* thing, and remember you've sworn not to say a word about this to any one. After a bit of talk of no particular consequence, about rich men making money by fraud, Parrett told the other two a dead secret. He spoke in a whisper, and made them swear they wouldn't let it out, and then he told them that his father had been four years in gaol! He did tell them what it was for, but I couldn't exactly catch it, for he leaned right forward in his chair——"

"How could you see that?" interrupted Reynolds sharply.

"Oh, they were too interested to notice me, and I was just able to get a glimpse of them with the corner of my eye."

"Mighty funny corner of an eye to see from under a sofa like that! Never mind, go on—Parrett leaned forward, and——"

"And whispered it into their ears. From the look of horror that came over their faces ——"

"You saw that, too, with the corner of your eye?"

"Yes, I did. Shut up! From the look of horror that came into their faces it was quite clear that it was something pretty bad."

"Like throwing stones at a bobby, or making a slide in the street," suggested Reynolds mockingly.

"No, it must have been something like fraud or forgery, for that was what they were talking about just before."

"Bah!" exclaimed Reynolds; "I don't believe a word of what you have said, and even if it were true you would be a vile sneak for having listened like that. If what you say had taken place you ought to have come out from under the sofa."

"I suppose you would have."

"Yes, I would, whatever it might have cost. If any talk had been going on like that I would never have been such a cad as to listen to it all."

"Saint Reynolds the Particular!" sneered Polson; "if you wouldn't have listened then, why do you listen now? I should think it's just as bad to listen to the story of the thing as to the thing itself."

"Well, there's something in that," admitted Reynolds, who felt a bit gravelled by Polson's last remark; "but it was partly want of thought, and partly that I have been certain all the time that you were making up as you went along. I don't believe it, I tell you."

"No more do I," said Smythe and Jackson, and two or three others.

"Well, don't, then," snarled Polson; "but it's true, all the same. Anyhow, it can be proved, and will be. I'm no saint, as the masters said, but I am decent, and I'm not going to be taught by the son of a gaol-bird, if I know it."

"No saint! Oh, yes, you are," Reynolds laughed. "Saint Polson the Particular," he jeered. "You wear the new character that you say the masters gave you like a nice, clean pinny, and you smooth it down, and pull out the ribbons, and take a look at the back, as proud as a girl, and you mustn't have it spoilt by the nasty fingers of the 'son of a gaol-bird.'"

"Oh, I see; you're just jealous of what the masters said about me in comparison with what they said of you."

"Go to bed!" said Reynolds. "Jealous

of *you* of all people in the world; one might as well be jealous of a dust-heap!"

"Thanks!"

"Oh, don't mention it! I know, of course, I did you an honour, but I didn't like to mention anything worse."

"Oh, shut up, you fellows!" said one boy a little older than the rest; "if what Polson says is true it is rather serious. We're not over particular here, but I think the Govs. might have appointed as master some one a bit better than the son of a gaol-bird. Will you swear that what you have said is true, Polson?"

"Of course I will. It's quite true."

"If it turns out not to be true it will be jolly bad for you."

"Of course, I know that; but it is true. Do you think it likely that I'd make up a thing like that?"

"No, but you might leave out something, or alter something."

"I've not altered anything. Parrett said as clearly as possible——"

"I thought he was whispering before," interrupted Reynolds.

"Don't be so fearfully smart, Reynolds; can't a fellow whisper clearly? He said that

his father had been four years in gaol just when they were talking of rich men being imprisoned for fraud and swindling."

"Why should he have told the others?"

"How can I tell? Ask me another. I suppose he wanted to get it off his mind. Why do murderers confess? Besides, he and Pearson and Jewel are as thick as thieves."

"Look here, Polson," said Reynolds, "I'm going straight to Parrett to ask if it is true?"

"Oh, no, you don't!" replied Polson hurriedly. "Where should I be? You seem to have forgotten your solemn promise not to say anything to anybody about this. That's just the way with you extra-particular, more than conscientious fellows. You make such an awful face over a gnat, but you gulp down a camel. I say, you other fellows, I hope you'll see that Reynolds keeps his promise."

"Of course I'll keep it," said Reynolds. "I only forgot about it in the excitement of the moment."

"Well, I hope you won't forget again, that's all. Remember, you've promised not to say anything at any time to the masters, nor to any of the fellows. It would be awfully

serious for me if this got out. Parrett would not rest till he got me expelled."

"For which I, for one, should be jolly glad," muttered Reynolds to Smythe, who slept next him. "What a reptile it is! I don't and I won't believe his yarn."

"No more do I; there's something fishy about it, I'm sure."

"*Fishy* isn't the word; he's too much like a snake or other vermin."

Mr. Jewel entered the room.

"Is Tims awake?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, I've made up my mind not to report you to the Doctor, after all. You will come to me to-morrow, and I'll let you know your punishment. Meanwhile, boys, this degree-getting must stop. We can't have boys running all over the house at night, spying on the masters, and knocking poor, decent women into the middle of next week. I have spoken to Mr. Parrett and Mr. Pearson; we shall keep a sharp look-out, and the next boy we catch at this degree-getting business goes to the Doctor. Do you all understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"All right, good night; it is time to stop talking, and to go to sleep."

"Jolly decent of him," whispered Tims, when he had gone out.

"What did I tell you?" said Polson to the dormitory, in a tone of triumph.

"That doesn't prove the rest of what you said," rejoined Reynolds.

No more was said, and the boys, one by one, dropped off to sleep. Polson was the last to do so, and before he slept he had decided upon a plan of campaign.

CHAPTER XXI

POLSON'S PLAN OF CAMPAIGN

THE next day Polson began to put his plan of campaign into operation. He had, as we have seen, made the boys in the dormitory promise most faithfully that they would say nothing about what he had told them, and, on the whole, the promise was well kept. But that did not mean that his own mouth was shut. He chose several of the elder boys, to whom he, under the pledge of secrecy, told his story about Mr. Parrett. There were, amongst these, boys who, like Polson, had some special reason for disliking him. With these Polson conspired, and they resolved that they would, in the coming holidays, tell their story to their parents or guardians, and try to persuade them to write to the Governors of the school, protesting against the "son of a gaol-bird" being a master in such a school as the "Anglo-Indian and Imperial."

Mr. Parrett had, by this time, gained a firm footing in the school, and with most of the boys he was very popular. He was known as a master who was just and fearless, straight and strong. He had also, since the St. Anne's match, done very well in cricket, and the part he had played in the capture of the redoubtable Scragg had added to his reputation. With many of the older boys he was very friendly, and so Polson, in his efforts to sow tares in Mr. Parrett's field, several times met with unpleasant snubs and reverses.

Several to whom he began to tell the story took the same view as Reynolds, that, when the talk in the masters' room became so personal, he ought to have made his presence known, whatever it might have meant, and some even stopped him in the middle of his story and refused to hear more. But all, of course, were not so honourable, and by the time Polson had finished sowing his tares a nice little crop of bad feeling and suspicion had already begun to appear. He took care to water and foster this crop, and before the end of the term Mr. Parrett began to feel that, whilst some boys were even more friendly to him than they had been before,

others had grown unfriendly and suspicious. Notwithstanding Polson's pledges of secrecy, the matter began to be talked about and discussed, and a party began to form who tried in little ways to show Mr. Parrett that they did not approve of his presence as a master in the Anglo-Indian and Imperial, and through some scraps of conversation that he now and then overheard he began to understand the reason of this. He cared very little for all this, however, and made his authority respected by big and small right up to the end of the term.

There is one incident that must be told as bearing upon the sequel of this story. The day after the incident related in the last chapter one of the servants came to Mr. Parrett with a penknife in her hand.

"Is this your knife, sir?"

"No," said Mr. Parrett; "where did you find it?"

"Mrs. Stubbs found it under the sofa, sir, this morning, in the masters' room."

"Oh, let me look at it."

Mr. Parrett took the knife and examined it. It was a very stylish knife with a tortoise-shell handle, and had in it a small scissors, tooth-pick, etc. He at once recog-

nised it, for a few days before he had had, in class, to take it away from Polson, who was playing with it.

"I recognise it and know to whom it belongs. I will give it back to the owner. You can leave it with me."

"Thank you, sir."

Mr. Parrett sent for Polson, and after a few minutes he turned up.

"Isn't this knife yours, Polson?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you know where it was found?"

"No, sir."

"Under the sofa in the masters' room."

Polson, quite taken by surprise, turned red up to the roots of his hair; he could not help it.

Mr. Parrett looked at him curiously.

"Do you know how it came there?"

"No, sir."

"You haven't been mixed up with another burglary, I suppose?"

Again Polson flushed hotly. "No, sir."

"Well, it's very strange that it should have been found there, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"When did you last have it?"

"Yesterday, I think, sir."

"Did you lend it to any one?"

"I don't remember doing so, sir."

"Where do you generally carry it?"

"In the ticket pocket in my coat, sir."

"Well, all I can say is, that it is very remarkable that it should have been found in such a place. I suppose you did not lend it to any of the masters?"

"No, sir."

"Haven't you missed it before?"

"No, sir."

"And you haven't been lying under the sofa in the masters' room?"

Again Polson blushed furiously, and answered rather shakily, "No, sir, of course not."

"Well, take it. But it's too good a knife to lose. Take better care of it."

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Parrett had some suspicion that something was wrong, but could not imagine what exactly it could be. Another circumstance aroused his suspicion a few days afterwards. He was taking the Fourth Form, when he intercepted a note addressed to Peter Plantagenet Polson, Esq., D.Litt.

He said nothing, but thought to himself

that he would like to find out what exploit Polson had been guilty of to entitle him to a Doctorate of Literature.

A little later, in the class, he said to Jobbings, the big, good-natured dolt of the class, "Jobbings, can you tell me what a Doctor of Literature is?"

"Yes, sir," said Jobbings eagerly, delighted to have a question which he could answer; "he's a boy who goes downstairs from our dormitory and touches the table in the masters' room."

The boys laughed, but again Polson turned violently red and tried to hide his face. Mr. Parrett noticed this.

"Are you a Doctor of Literature, Jobbings?"

"No, sir, but Pol——"

Some one gave him a kick, and he stopped short in the middle of a word.

"Yes, 'but Pol——'? Come, finish your sentence."

"I had rather not, sir."

"Perhaps, then, I can do it for you. 'But Polson is,' you were about to say?"

It was now Jobbings s turn to become red.

"Are you a Doctor of Literature, Polson?

of the Dormitory University, I mean, of course."

"N-n-no, sir."

"Well, why does some friend of yours in this class address you as Peter Plantagenet Polson, Esq., D.Litt. ?"

"I don't know, sir."

The boys looked at one another. It was part of the code of honour at the A. I. and I. to own up, if directly asked about some fault that had been committed.

Mr. Parrett continued. "Does your Dormitory University give honorary degrees ? in this case degrees for nothing ?"

"No, sir."

"Well, I am afraid, whether you will confess to the honour or not, that you must have won yours. I wonder when it was. You did not leave your knife under the sofa when you gave us the honour of a visit from you, did you ?"

Mr. Parrett said this half jokingly, but when he saw the wave of colour that again flowed over Polson's neck and face, and noticed his confusion, he began to think that there was something behind all this, and that his bow, drawn at a venture, had sent a shaft home.

He looked at Polson steadily for a moment, and Polson got up and said hotly, "I'm not a Doctor of Literature, and I don't know what you mean, sir."

Mr. Parrett noticed the nudges that passed from boy to boy, and said, "All right, my boy, you need not be so hot about it, but it is a strange coincidence, is it not? that you should be addressed by the title D.Litt., which title Jobbings tells me can be gained by a surreptitious visit to the masters' room at night, that he thinks that you are a D.Litt., and that your knife should have come mysteriously under the sofa in the masters' room. Of course, it can only be a case of a number of coincidences, so I will say no more about it."

After this Polson went round to the boys who knew about his visit to the masters' room, and once again urged them to say nothing about it. He was getting very nervous lest he should be found out.

The half-yearly examinations began about ten days before the commencement of the holidays. Polson did not do at all well in most of the papers, but in history he answered all the questions, and knew that he had answered them correctly.

At last the holidays came, and the boys went off to the several homes where they were to spend them.

Polson's father was on a visit to England, and was staying in a London hotel. Polson went to stay with him for two or three weeks before he returned to South Africa.

One afternoon they were sitting together in their private sitting-room. Mr. Polson had had a good lunch, and then a little nap, and was now lounging on the couch smoking a cigar. Polson felt that it was an auspicious occasion for introducing the subject of Mr. Parrett. His father was a short, thick-set man, stout and pompous, with a bull neck and a dull, brick-red face. He had rather small pig eyes, set too close together. He was dressed in a suit of a large check pattern, and in his tie he wore a scarf-pin, in which a magnificent diamond sparkled and flashed. He looked the confident, contented man of the world, with a very good opinion of his own importance and position in the world.

"Father, we have such a beast of a new master at school."

"Oh, Pete, boy! In what way is he a beast?"

"He has been down on me from the beginning, and is a cad."

"Oh, that's bad!"

"Yes, and I heard him say something very wicked and untrue about you."

Mr. Polson pricked up his ears and grew redder in the face.

"Did he? What impertinence! What has a schoolmaster got to do with me, I should like to know?"

"Well, it was this way, father. At school we have a Dormitory University, which gives degrees to boys who do certain difficult and risky things. One of the things is to go down from our bedroom into the masters' room, touch the table, and get back again without being caught. For this you get the degree of Doctor of Literature. I don't do much of this sort of thing myself, because I know you don't like it, but one night I was dared to do it and could not get out of it, and so I slipped downstairs into the masters' room. Another ass of a chap who went with me was seen by Jewel, the master on duty, and chased all over the show. I ran into the masters' room and hid under the sofa, and couldn't get out again. First Jewel came in, and then Parrett and Pearson, the other two masters of our

house. They began yarning, and spoke first of me and then of you. I couldn't help hearing what they said. Parrett was very rude about those splendid donations you gave to the hospitals, and said he thought they must be thank-offerings for some very clever swindling you had brought off in Africa."

"Eh, what! he said that of me when the papers were all talking about my munificent gifts and my princely charity?" Mr. Polson blew out his chest and looked full of offended dignity.

"He talked about a paper called *Veracity*, I think."

"*Veracity!* It ought to be called *Lies!* I would bring a libel suit against that paper if I could bring myself to notice it."

"Well, then he said you and all other big swindlers like you (these are his words and not mine, and I hate even to repeat them)—that all other big swindlers like you ought to be put into gaol, that you do more harm than ten thousand burglars, and that a few years in penal servitude would do you all the good in the world, and so on."

"He said all that?"

"Yes, father; I am so ashamed to repeat

it, but a man like that ought to be shown up. I could not help hearing it all."

"No, of course, my boy; you did quite right to listen, and such things ought to be found out and punished. Big swindler, indeed! ME! who have been and opened out South Africa, and developed the gold mines, all for the good of the people and country. ME! who have given labour to thousands of Chinese coolies, and paid out money all round to hospitals and churches, and libraries, ME to be called a swindler! I'll make it warm for that young feller. What's his name?"

"Parrett; Paul Parrett."

"I'll give him Parrett. I'll Paul him. I know some of the Governors of the school, and I'll see whether he'll call me swindler again." Mr. Polson was now very red in the face, and his little pig eyes were blazing with anger and rage.

"Well, then he went on to say something about his own father."

"His own father, eh? What right has a little bounder like that to have a father?"

Both father and son laughed at this, as though it was a consummate joke. Then

Polson Junior went on: "Parrett told the other two masters as a dead secret that his own father had been in gaol for four years."

"In gaol for four years! *What!*"

"It's gospel truth, father. Parrett's father was a regular gaol-bird, and yet the Governors have made him a teacher in the school. Probably he's a thief himself. He was great pals with a man named Scragg, who lived near, and who committed a burglary in the school. Parrett turned on him and got him five years' penal servitude. Talk about setting a thief to catch a thief! Some of the boys think that Parrett had something to do with the burglary."

"Now this is something like!" said Mr. Polson, rubbing his hands. "His father a gaol-bird, and he a companion of burglars! But, I say, Pete, are you sure of all this?"

"As sure of it as I am that I am sitting here talking to you."

"His father a gaol-bird four years and he a teacher in the A. I. and I.! I'll write to the papers, I'll expose the thing. It's a shame and disgrace that the sons of gentlemen should be brought into contact

with such riff-raff! I cannot think how the Governors came to appoint such a man."

"Of course, they could not have known. He came in under false pretences. He said as much."

"Well, then, I'll write to them and put things straight. If I were not starting for the Cape so soon I'd meet them personally, and give them a piece of my mind. But as it is I'll make it warm enough for that Paul Parrett. I'm very glad that you told me all this, my son. You're quite certain of what you have told me?"

"Yes, quite. I heard it as slick as possible from his own lips."

"What was his father in prison for?"

"Something to do with fraud and forgery, in a bank, you know."

"Fraud? He must have been a dishonest swindler, and a fool, besides, to get into gaol. Just fancy the son of a man like that being allowed to teach the sons of gentlemen!"

Mr. Polson swelled with honest indignation, and forthwith sat down to write a letter to the Secretary of the school. Polson, having safely got his father on to the war-path, went

out for a walk, happy and contented beyond words. But before he got far he turned back and said to his father. "Oh, father, don't bring my name in. That ass of a Parrett has already got some idea of my having been in the masters' room that night, and you don't want me to be expelled, do you?"

"Expelled! My son expelled! I'd like to see 'em at it! But all right, I'll not bring you in."

CHAPTER XXII

THE GOVERNORS' MEETING

MR. POLSON got out some notepaper of the best quality, scented, and having stamped on it a crest, a sprig of broom—the royal Planta Genista—a crest to which he had as much right as he would have had to a pudding or a pig, either of which emblems, be it said, would have been perhaps more suitable—he commenced to write.

This is the letter he evolved:

"SIR,

"I have heard on very good authority that a master who has lately been appointed to the A. I. and I School., Mr. Paul Parrett by name, comes of a very disreputable family. I have sure and certain information that his father was four years in gaol, for fraud and forgery. I cannot understand how the Governors of the

school could have been so culpably lax and careless as to make such an appointment, but I am sure that it must have been in complete ignorance of the real circumstances of the case, and that they will now immediately take steps to rectify their regrettable error. Within a fortnight I am returning to the Cape, but if on the receipt of this letter the Governors do not cancel the appointment they have made, I shall be obliged reluctantly to make the whole matter public by such means as may lie in my power. I further hear that this Mr. Parrett has formed some very undesirable connections in the neighbourhood of the school, and from the innocent and child-like prattle of my dear son, Peter Plantagenet, I have gathered the fact that he was special friends with a disreputable character of the name of Scrap or Scrat, or something of that sort, now in prison for burglary. It is surely a disgrace and a scandal that the sons of gentlemen who have served the Empire should be subjected to the indignity and pollution of having such a man as this for their teacher. I cannot say how deeply it has grieved me to think that my own son, a boy of singularly pure and honest character, should have been brought

into contact with such contamination. Feeling confident that my letter will immediately receive the attention it calls for,

"Yours faithfully,

"PLANTAGENET POLSON."

Mr. Polson was not a man of very deep or wide education, and he felt very proud when he had turned out this production. It seemed to him a masterpiece in the art of letter-writing. After reading and re-reading it several times, and tasting the full flavour of some of the clauses, he sealed it, and sent it to the Secretary of the school, a gentleman named Dukes. In a few days he received a reply that his letter and one or two more to the same effect would be laid before the Governors at their meeting at the beginning of September. Mr. Polson had to be satisfied with this, and a few days before the Governors met started for the Cape.

When the Governors met, one of the items of business on the Agenda paper was, "The case of Mr. Paul Parrett."

When they came to this item the Secretary read Mr. Polson's letter, and two or three others somewhat to the same effect. The

Governors looked at one another in utter astonishment as they listened.

When the Secretary had finished reading the letters the Chairman said, "I happen to know what modicum of truth lies behind these letters. Most business men will remember the hard case of John Parrett in connection with the great forgery at Bufferton's Bank several years ago—how he was sentenced to five years' imprisonment for a crime which, as afterwards transpired, he had not committed. You will remember that after he had been in prison for some years a colleague in the bank confessed on his deathbed that he had really committed the forgery, and that John Parrett knew nothing of it. The matter was taken up afresh in this new light, Mr. Parrett was proved to be quite innocent, he received a free pardon, and was taken back into his old position in the bank. Mr. John Parrett was the father of our Mr. Paul Parrett. I knew him well, and can vouch for it that he was one of the finest Christian gentlemen it has been my privilege to know. I cannot see how this sad event in his life can possibly affect his son's fitness as a teacher in our school. Dr. Taylor assures me he would not lose Mr. Parrett's services for

worlds, for, even during the short time since he was appointed, he has done great good in the school, and has proved himself one of the most able of all the masters, that he thoroughly understands and can manage boys, and that he exerts a healthy, strong moral influence which is invaluable."

Dr. Taylor nodded approval to all this, and when the Chairman had finished, he said, " I wish to endorse what our Chairman has said. Mr. Parrett, though he started under peculiar difficulties, has proved himself invaluable, and I must confess that I would rather lose the support, whatever it may be worth, of a dozen Mr. Polsons than the presence of Mr. Parrett as a master."

Here one of the Governors, a man named Truckle, a personal friend of Mr. Polson's, got up and said excitedly, " I object to these slighting allusions to my friend, Mr. Polson, who is a Christian gentleman of princely and munificent charity, and a helper in all good works."

" This Mr. Polson is the gold magnate ? " asked the Chairman.

" Yes."

" The one *Veracity* attacked ? "

" Um—yes."

"Has he brought a libel action against *Veracity?*"

"No; he scorns to notice its paltry attacks."

"Oh, my friend must then excuse me if I draw my own conclusions, especially as I have had personal experience of Mr. Polson's methods."

The other Governors laughed, and Mr. Truckle flushed angrily, but said nothing further.

Some one then said, "I move that we take no further notice of these letters, and that we proceed to the next business. As the Chairman has said, the facts that have come out to-day in no way affect Mr. Parrett's fitness for the position he holds, and if the school loses anything by the rumours that have got about, better that than that we should add to a great injustice by dishonouring the memory of one who was evidently an honourable though unfortunate gentleman."

"I object! I object!" said Mr. Truckle; "surely the mere fact that a man has been in prison should be enough to prevent his son from teaching in a school like the A. I. and I. Besides, the Secretary should have found all this out before, when the matter

of Mr. Parrett's appointment was up before the Governors."

The Secretary was about to reply, but the Chairman got in before him: "I knew all about the matter, and it was at my request that the Secretary said nothing about it," he said coolly. "I could not see that it had anything to do with the matter in hand. I could hardly have believed that one of our number could have taken up the position that Mr. Truckle has assumed to-day. If Mr. Parrett Senior had really committed the crime of which he was accused I can understand, however hard it might be upon the son, that the father's sins might be visited upon him, but to perpetuate in the person of his son a very grave injustice done to a good and honourable man would surely be not only wicked, but absurd. May I suggest to Mr. Truckle that, on his principles, Ephraim and Manasseh, who were counted worthy of receiving a special blessing from the great patriarch Jacob, could never have been counted worthy of becoming teachers in the A. I. and I. Do I really understand that he would be willing to take up such an absurd position?"

Poor Mr. Truckle did not understand where

matters had got to, nor how Ephraim and Manasseh had been drawn into the affair. He stuttered and stammered, but at last was understood to say that he would have no personal objection to Ephraim and Manasseh provided they had good recommendations as teachers.

"There!" said the Chairman triumphantly. "Mr. Truckle would have no personal objection to Ephraim and Manasseh, though, of course, he must know they were the sons of Joseph, who, an innocent man, was cast into prison. What possible objection can he then have to Mr. Paul Parrett?"

The Governors again laughed, and the Chairman having got them into good humour, immediately went on: "Gentlemen, whatever it may cost the school, I think we ought to do the right, and take no notice of these letters beyond letting our correspondents know the bare facts of the case. Will any one formally propose that?"

The Governor who had before spoken along these lines made a formal proposal and it was seconded. Mr. Truckle was not a very courageous man, and as the Chairman carried much weight, and was a man of great power

and influence, he contented himself by saying, "Perhaps the Chairman is right, but did I not understand my friend, Mr. Polson, to say that Mr. Parrett had formed some very undesirable connections in the neighbourhood of the school? Could Dr. Taylor tell us anything about this?"

Dr. Taylor replied, "There is no truth whatever in Mr. Polson's statement, and as for the burglar Scragg, Mr. Parrett had more to do with his capture and conviction than any one else."

"I hope Mr. Truckle is now satisfied," said the Chairman.

Mr. Truckle gave a sort of non-committal grunt, and the proposal was carried. "Before we pass away from the matter," said the Chairman, "I should like to ask one question. From one or two hints in the letters that we have had read to us I should judge that Polson Junior had had a very long finger in this pie. Might I ask Dr. Taylor if he is a boy of 'singularly pure and honest character,' and whether he often indulges in 'innocent and child-like prattle?'"

"I should say," replied Dr. Taylor emphatically, "that that description of him is as far from the truth as it well could be. He

is a boy who, once at least, has narrowly escaped expulsion."

The case against Mr. Parrett had utterly collapsed, and it was quite clear that the emphatic declarations as to his character and ability had strongly impressed the Governors in his favour.

CHAPTER XXIII

POLSON FOUND OUT

MR. PARRETT spent his summer holidays with his mother in a Devonshire farmhouse near Laderam Bay. One day he and his mother were sitting on the shingle reading, when, looking up, he saw little Fawcett coming toward him.

"Hallo, Fawcett!" he said. "What are you doing here?"

"My mother has come home from India, sir, and she is living at Sidmouth. We have come over here for the morning."

"Well, this is my mother, Fawcett, and I think she would like to know yours."

Fawcett ran back and, taking his mother by the hand, he led her up to Mrs. Parrett. After the introduction was over, Mrs. Fawcett, who had a pale, sad, but sweet face, said to Mr. Parrett, "I have to thank you very much,

Mr. Parrett, for your kindness to my boy. He has told me about you, and how you helped him at the time of my husband's death."

Mr. Parrett flushed up, but said he had been very glad to help and comfort little Harry, as he himself knew what it was to lose a father.

After a time Mr. Parrett strolled off with Fawcett to show him the wonders of the little bay, the arch eaten out by the sea, and, from the top of the cliffs, the needles of rock standing up out of the sea, on which the gulls love to build. With Mr. Parrett's glasses they could see quite distinctly the birds sitting on their nests, and in one nest the little seagulls which had only lately come out of the eggs. Little Fawcett was very happy, and chatted gaily about how he had been spending his holidays, and discussed the possibilities of the coming term. After a good stroll they went back again to rejoin the ladies, and before long it was time for Mrs. Fawcett to go.

After they had gone Mrs. Parrett said to her son, "Mrs. Fawcett told me something which will interest you, Paul. We began to speak about her recent sorrow. I told her

that it was not very long since I had lost your dear father. She is a good, sweet, patient woman, and we got very confidential. I was telling her how father had suffered when she suddenly exclaimed, 'Oh, that explains everything.'

"'I beg your pardon,' I said.

"'Why, Willie,' she answered, 'after he had told me how good your son had been to him, said that he was very troubled about something he had heard at school. A boy, Polson, who, I should say, is not a very desirable character, had been spreading a report that your husband had been for many years in gaol. He could not believe that this was true. This explains all.'"

"Hum!" exclaimed Mr. Parrett, "so it was Polson who spread that story, was it?" He fell into thought, and then suddenly exclaimed, "Now I see everything!"

"What, Paul?"

"Why, I have just discovered the solution of several little things that were puzzling me."

He then told his mother the incidents of the finding of Polson's knife under the sofa in the masters' room, and of the

discovery that Polson was a Doctor of Literature.

"Now," he continued, "I have got a clue to the whole thing. I was examining the history paper of the Fourth Form the other day, and was very much surprised to find that Polson, of all people in the world, had done an excellent paper. True, it was in some places too much in the words of the book, but so far as knowledge of events, dates, etc., went it was almost perfect. In other papers he had done singularly badly. Now I remember that one night—I believe it was the very night before the knife was brought to me—I was talking to Pearson and Jewel in the masters' room about Polson's father, who is rather a bad egg. Then we got on to the injustices of the law, and I told them about father. That was the only night I spoke to them or any one else about it. Then I read the history paper to Pearson, and discussed it with him. That very night, too, Jewel had caught a boy named Tims getting a degree. Putting everything together I can see quite clearly what happened. Polson must have run into the masters' room, with Tims and Jewel after him, and hidden under the sofa. Then he must have heard all our

conversation. I remember it well, and it must have been a painful one for him to listen to, for we did not spare his father or himself."

"Poor boy," said Mrs. Parrett.

"Wretched little sneak! See how he afterwards used the knowledge he got: in one direction to slander father all up and down the school, and in the other to help himself in the history exam. No, mother, my stock of patience with that young fellow is just about at an end. I shall report him, and he will probably be expelled."

"Have patience with him a little longer, Paul. He's but a boy, and may yet be won for the right. At any rate, whatever you may find it your duty to do next term, let's pray for the boy during the holidays. Of course, I don't like what he did in spreading slander about father, but his father is bad, you say, and I pity a boy with a bad father. I know how much having a good father meant to you. It was the best gift God could give you, and you must show your gratitude by doing all you can for those not so fortunate as yourself. We will pray for the boy, and God will yet have mercy on him and turn him into the right way."

Later in the holidays Mr. Parrett received the letter from the school Secretary which we have already heard about. He was, of course, a good deal vexed and hurt at first, and also a little anxious, but before his return to school he had a very hearty and kind letter from the Doctor, telling him of what had happened at the meeting of the Board of Governors. From this letter he learnt that it was Mr. Polson who had been the chief complainant, and so he was quite able to guess what part Polson Junior had played in the matter.

Notwithstanding these troubles Mr. Parrett and his mother spent a very happy holiday at Laderam Bay. They saw Mrs. Fawcett and Harry again on several occasions, and the more Mr. Parrett saw of the latter the more he liked him. He was a brave, straight, manly little fellow, and took no pains to conceal the great liking he had taken to his master.

School had now begun again, and the boys were all back. Mr. Parrett had returned to work in good spirits. Only one thing troubled him—what was he going to do about Polson ? It was quite clear to him that the boy had in no wise turned over a new leaf.

He was certain that Polson had cheated in the history paper, and he felt it difficult to know how to proceed.

Mr. Parrett told his difficulties to his friend, Pearson. The latter was very indignant at Mr. Parrett's account of Mr. Polson's letter, and quite concurred in the judgment that it was all Polson Junior's doing. He also thought it extremely probable that Mr. Parrett's theory about his having been under the sofa was the right one.

"In any case," said Mr. Pearson, "I should set him another paper, and see how he gets on with it."

"That's what I intend to do, and I mean to ask him questions in some way connected with the questions I asked before, so that if he really knew his work before, he will be able to answer them, but they will be sufficiently different to stump him, if he only crammed up the special points he needed in order to be able to answer the old questions."

The story about Mr. Polson's complaint to the Board of Governors had leaked out through the uncle of one of the boys being one of the Governors. This boy had heard his uncle incautiously discussing the matter

afterwards. He had heard and understood enough to realise that Mr. Parrett's father had not been a "gaol-bird," in the proper meaning of that term.

Reynolds and Smythe were very indignant at what had happened, and made it warm for Polson in the dormitory.

Reynolds led off one or two nights after they had come back from the holidays.

"Polson," he said, after Mr. Pearson, who was on duty, had gone downstairs, "allow me to tell you, as I have told you before, that you are a beastly cad! I knew perfectly well that there was some lying in what you told us about Parrett's father, and sure enough there was. You knew quite well that though he was put into gaol, he was a perfectly innocent man."

"I told you he was in gaol for four years. Was that right?"

"Yes; but there is all the difference in the world between being put in gaol through an awful mistake and real imprisonment for fraud. Jenkins heard his uncle telling all about the Governors' meeting where they discussed your father's precious letter, and he said that some of the Govs. said no end of his straightness and goodness."

"Bah!" said Polson; "I don't know anything about all that; I only know that Parrett's father was a gaol-bird, and that is enough for me."

"Well, it isn't enough for me; all your story about fraud, and the look of horror on Pearson and Jewel's faces (yes, I remember all about it) was all lies, and unless you apologise publicly to Parrett, I, for one, mean to give you a jolly good hiding first, and then have nothing to do with you afterwards. Every decent fellow will send you to Coventry for this."

"Apologise publicly to Parrett! Not much," said Polson.

"All right," said Reynolds; "you'll take the consequences."

"Oh, certainly," said Polson. "I'm not frightened of any consequences that you can bring upon me."

The following day, sure enough, Reynolds got hold of Polson, dragged him to a quiet corner of the playground, and proceeded to put his threat into execution. He was about the same height and age as Polson, but a good deal more active and muscular.

Polson at first showed fight, but was soon hopelessly beaten, and Reynolds gave him

what he had promised, a "jolly good hiding." A crowd gathered round the two, and at the end, Reynolds explained exactly what he had been about. "You fellows see," he finished up, "I don't mind a fellow fighting a master fairly and squarely, but this has been a dirty business, and that cad," pointing at Polson, who was standing by, crying with shame and vexation, "has gone in for lies and low-down tricks, and I, for one, am going to have nothing to do with him. He's been in Coventry before, but it seems to make no difference to him. I am going to send him to perpetual Coventry."

The general verdict was that Reynolds was right, and Polson was, by the majority of the school, sent to Coventry.

This made him savage and morose, and his temper was not improved by an incident in preparation next day.

"Polson," said Mr. Parrett, "stand up."

Polson stood up, and Mr. Parrett noticed that one eye was bruised and discoloured.

"How did you get that black eye?"

Before Polson could answer Reynolds calmly said, "I gave it to him, sir."

"You two have been fighting, then?"

"Well, sir, you can call it that if you like, but Polson did not want to fight."

"Why were you fighting?"

"I'm sorry that I cannot say, sir."

"Well, you know the rule that all boys who fight must go to the Doctor."

"Yes, sir; but as I alone am responsible for this fight, I will go alone, if I may."

"Well, go presently; now I have something that I want to say to the whole class. A rumour has got about the school that my father was once in prison. That rumour is true, but I want to tell you how this imprisonment came about. He held a position of great trust in a bank, and a fraud was committed by means of forgery. My father was suspected, tried, and sent to prison. After four years the real culprit, who was dying, confessed. My father's innocence was then perfectly proved, he was released from prison, and was taken back into his old position in the bank. He has since died, but I proudly cherish his memory for the quiet, patient courage with which he bore all the wrong and injustice done him. I know that Polson has spread the story about the school, but has represented my father as really a criminal and

forger. I want to ask him where he heard that story ? "

Polson was very white, and trembling in every limb, and did not or could not reply. He dared not, in the presence of all the boys, deny it altogether.

" Well ? "

" I cannot say."

Mr. Parrett looked at him with scorn.

" I think I can make a very shrewd guess. You heard it as you lay under the sofa one night in the masters' room."

Polson turned whiter still, but said not a word.

" One night towards the end of last term I told the story of my father's imprisonment to Mr. Jewel and Mr. Pearson in the masters' room. At the end of the conversation I discussed with Mr. Pearson a history paper I was setting for the Fourth Form. Polson, while he miserably failed in other papers, answered that paper remarkably well, and, in fact, came out top of the class. Polson's knife was found under the sofa in the masters' room. Polson is a Doctor of Literature. Putting everything together I think I am justified in what I have just said to Polson. In any case, I am going to give him another

history paper to do. I will give him two days in which to rub up his old knowledge. If he fails badly, as I am afraid he will, I shall lay the whole matter before the Doctor. I advise him during the next two days to give a good deal of his spare time to history."

After this Reynolds went to the Doctor, told him why he had been sent to him, said firmly but respectfully that he was sorry that he could not tell why he had fought, and took without a word the caning the Doctor gave him. The Doctor, it must be stated, did not lay on very hard, as he had a pretty shrewd idea what the quarrel had probably been about.

Two days later Polson had his history paper and made a complete hash of it. It was a Wednesday, and he gave up his paper at half-past twelve, and then went out into the playground, thoroughly miserable and morose. He saw that proofs were closing in on him, and that, eventually, he would most certainly be expelled.

He moped about in quiet corners of the playground, and no one had anything to say to him. He had lost caste, and those who were most intimate with him before avoided him now.

After dinner he went outside the school grounds by himself. As he passed the lodge gates, one of the little Stubbses, who was standing outside in the road, let fly with a catapult at a sparrow in the opposite hedge. His stone hit against the catapult stick, glanced off, and struck Polson sharply on the ear. He was nervous and irritable, and running up to little Stubbs he gave him a box on the ear which knocked that young man to the ground. He set up a lusty howl, which brought out the redoubtable Mrs. Stubbs.

"What's the matter with you, Billy?"

"'E 'it me, and knocked me over—and 'e's made my trousis all muddy, and spoilt em."

Mrs. Stubbs turned in great wrath on Polson.

"'Ere, young mister, what did you do that for?"

Polson turned away in disdain; he was not going to argue matters out with Mrs. Stubbs! This made her still more angry. She followed him, and said in her high shrill treble, "Can't you give a ear to a respectable 'ooman? What right 'ave you to come round 'ere, struttin' round like

one of King Soliman's pay-cocks, and hinflictin' un'oly torture on an hinfant of days? whom his decent and 'ard-workin' mother 'ave tried 'ard to keep 'im hout of the broad and flowering way, so that when he is old he will not depart from it. What *air* we a comin' to, I should like to know, when a hinnocent little lamb can't go out in the king's 'ighway to do a bit of a frisk, but some nasty butcher of a fellow must come up, and catch it a klip on the ear that makes it wallop in the mirey clay, and spoil its best trousis that 'is mother bought 'im in the sweat of 'er eyebrows, and which 'e haint worn no more than two years anno dominey."

Mrs. Stubbs had here to stop for breath, but soon continued, "I won't 'ave it, and I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll just go along to Mr. Parrett, I will, and tell him of your nasty ways. I 'eard what you did to him, and 'im as nice a gent as ever wore pepper and salt trousis, and a straw 'at, with a green and white ribbon. I'll tell 'im 'ow you used my hinnocent little lamb, that never said bo to a goblin. I'll tell 'im, too, 'ow I saw you run into the masters' room that night, and never come out. I was near the preparation

room door that night, and I saw you come rarin' and tarin' down the stairs in front of Mr. Jewil and that young varmint, Tims, and then you went whup! into the masters' room, like a rabbit into its barrow, and never come hout. I never said nothing to Mr. Jewil, I didn't, and this is your gratitood! This is the way you sting the 'and that warmed you, and bite the tongue that didn't give you hup to the henemy and the havenger. You're a hadder, that's what you *air*, a hadder with a sarpint's tooth."

By this time Mrs. Stubbs had followed close at Polson's heels for more than fifty yards, and as she had talked herself out of breath, she stopped.

Polson had heard her first words with disdain, but her last filled him with apprehension.

"Oh, I say, Mrs. Stubbs," he said, "I'll give you sixpence not to say anything about that."

As it happened, he had chosen just the wrong way to appease her wrath. "Sixpence!" she scolded, "sixpence! Offerin' a un'oly bribe to a decent 'ooman who 'as brought hup 'er family in the paths of virtoo, and cast 'er widow's mite reglar into the treasurer

hevery Sunday. Sixpence! Keep your nasty sixpences, and just learn that a British mother, though she may be meek and mild as Balaam's hass or the modes' vilet, and not able to say a word to them that vex 'er righteous soul, ain't to be kept from the 'ard path of dooty by any filthy lucifer which is the root of all evil."

She turned with dignity and went off to the lodge with her head in the air. A few minutes afterwards she waylaid Mr. Parrett, poured out her grievances into his unwilling ear, and finished up with the following sentence: "And there's one thing more, sir. I 'ave been a city of refoog to that boy, I 'ave. When Mr. Jewil was one night a pursooin' that boy Tims down the stairs, I saw that young varmint Powlson whip into the masters' room, and 'e never come out again. Mr. Jewil and Tims, after they had flabbergasted *hall* the bref out of my fleshly carcis, went along to the masters' room, and I waited to see what would 'appen to Powlson. But 'e didn't come out at all; Tims came out alone. I didn't know where my young lord Powlson was, but I knew he was somewhere in the masters' room all the time, 'e was; and it was me found the knife under the sofy

next mornin'. I guessed where Powlson 'ad been, but I didn't say nothing about it; it wasn't my pie, and I wasn't goin' to put my finger into some one else's apple-cart and get it scalded. But now young Powlson has showed 'isself a sarpint's tooth, by knockin' my hinnocent little lamb into a mirey puddle, and spilin' his new trousis, that I hadn't only bought two years ago, hanno dominey, B.C., I says to myself——"

"Yes, Mrs. Stubbs," said Mr. Parrett, "I understand you to say that you saw Polson go into the masters' room the night that Mr. Jewel had that little accident with Tims and you, and that he did not come out again."

"Yes, sir; that's it heggsacly, and more-somever——"

"All right, I will inquire into all you've told me. Good afternoon, Mrs. Stubbs."

Mr. Parrett sheered off quickly; as it was a half-holiday he was just going out for a walk, and he did not want half an hour of Mrs. Stubbs just then. He had already looked over Polson's paper, and seen that it was very bad, and this piece of information clearly sealed his fate. Not only had he been guilty of eavesdropping, and using the information

he had gained thereby in a most wicked way, but he had also been guilty of deliberate cheating in an examination, besides much direct lying. For this kind of thing there could be no sort of allowance made at the A. I. and I.

Polson had hung about the gates until he had seen Mrs. Stubbs approach Mr. Parrett, and then, without permission, he had started off by himself, in order to get away from everybody, for a chance of thinking what he was going to do. Mr. Parrett, who was not on duty, started out with Reynolds, Jackson, Smythe, little Fawcett, and one or two other boys for a walk to the sea. They went down by what was now called Snorty's path and had a bathe. It was a glorious afternoon in the early autumn, and the sea was as smooth as a mill-pond. After bathing and one or two handicaps on the sands to get warm, Mr. Parrett began examining the little pools left at the bottom of the cliffs for specimens for the microscope, and the boys were paddling and scrambling about on the rocks not far from him.

Polson, meanwhile, had walked along by himself along the top of the cliffs. He went along some distance, and his thoughts were

not pleasant ones. He saw that Mrs. Stubbs's testimony must be the last ounce that would turn the scale against him and lead, most certainly, to his expulsion. Now that he was face to face with this he did not seem to care very much for it, but his heart was full of unreasoning rage against Mr. Parrett, and he only wanted to have his revenge on him in some form. All sorts of impossible plans presented themselves to his mind, but none could he work out.

At last he turned and walked back. After a time he saw some boys on the beach beneath. The cliffs were steep here, though not very high, and he had to go quite close to the edge to see who were down below. As he peered over some one suddenly grasped him by the collar, and with a quick jerk pulled him behind a large rock. He looked round, considerably surprised, to recognise—Snorty! Snorty, thin, pale, and weary-looking, with black circles under his eyes, and an anxious, hunted expression on his face. Polson gasped with astonishment, and was about to cry out when Snorty drew out of his pocket a tiny revolver, which he held to Polson's head.

"Just keep quite quiet." His voice was

hoarse and husky, but he spoke in calm school-board accents. "I don't want to hurt you, but I'm desperate, and I don't care much what I do. Come along with me. Quick!"

CHAPTER XXIV

POLSON A CRIPPLE, BUT HEALED

POLSON kept quite quiet, but his knees shook under him, and he trembled all over.

"Please take that revolver from my head," he said, "and I won't make a sound, but go anywhere you want."

Snorty lowered it and said, "All right; that's nice and reasonable."

Then he led Polson to some furze bushes, in the very midst of which he had built himself a kind of booth. When he got there he made Polson crouch down amongst the bushes, and said, "There, that's just what I wanted, to get you in a quiet corner but I did not expect that you would fall into my arms like this. Now, look here, I'm desperate. The bobbies have

been close on my track in London, and I've had to make myself scarce. I've tramped it down here, and hoped to find a sack of things that I threw into a small pool near here. Do you know what happened to it?"

"What, the things you and Scragg burgled?"

"Yes."

"Oh, Parrett found the sack the next day. A bit of it was sticking out of the water, and he pulled it out and found all the wedding presents you had taken."

Snorty swore softly but earnestly. "I owe Parrett a good deal," he said; "and I'd like to pay it—pay it every farthing—that I would!"

"Well, he's down there."

"Where?"

"On the beach; I saw him just now."

"You did?"

"Yes. But, I say, I, too, wish that you could pay him."

"Why?"

"Because I owe him a lot too."

"Do you? Well, we'll see about that presently. But now to business; I want cash."

"I've got none for you."

"Oh, haven't you? Well, just turn out your pockets."

After a minute or two's search Snorty said, "That isn't bad for 'none';" he had fifteen shillings and threepence, which he had found in Polson's purse. Polson was particularly flush, as it was near the beginning of the term.

"Now, look here," Snorty said, "you'll say nothing to nobody about this. If I'm copped down here I'll let on everything about that scarf-pin, and a bit more. I won't go to chokey alone, not me; understand?"

Polson did understand.

"Well, now, about this Parrett; go and see where he is, and come back and tell me, and don't try and run away, neither."

Polson went, peered over the cliffs for a few seconds, and then came back.

"He's down at the bottom of the cliffs."

"What's he doing?"

"He's poking about in the pools."

An idea suddenly came to Snorty.

"Go out and see if there's any one in sight?"

Polson went and reported. "No, there's no one coming either way."

"Do you really want to pay out Parrett?"

"Yes," said Polson, nodding vigorously.

"Then come along, quick."

Polson followed him, and he crept quietly but cautiously to the edge of the cliffs.

The cliffs here sloped for a little way, and then fell almost precipitously forty or fifty feet to the beach. There were several large rocks on the sloping portion.

"Here," said Snorty; "we'll roll one of those on top of him."

The boys down below were quite taken up with their games on the beach, and took no notice of what was going on on the cliffs above their heads.

Mr. Parrett was bending over a pool at the very foot of the cliffs, a small net was in his hand, and he was quite engrossed in looking for specimens. Only one little fellow, whom Polson and Snorty did not notice, was lying on his back on some dry sand under the shade of a rock, looking at the sky and dreaming. It was Fawcett. A bird passed and he followed its flight. His eye caught a glimpse of

something moving on the cliffs above. He saw two boys, and one he at once recognised as Polson, the other he did not recognise. They were hauling and tugging at a big rock, moving it towards the edge of the cliff. He looked down and saw that they were almost directly above Mr. Parrett. In a flash he guessed what they were doing. He was on his feet in a moment, and running towards Mr. Parrett, who was only about twenty yards away.

"Sir! Sir!" he shouted. Mr. Parrett glanced up. Fawcett pointed upwards and shouted, "Move, sir, move!"

Mr. Parrett did not at once understand. He looked towards the top of the cliff. He saw nothing. By this time Fawcett was by his side, and was trying to push him aside.

"Move, sir, move!" he said again; "they're trying to throw a rock on you."

Just then he saw a mass of rock poised on the very edge of the cliff. For a moment it stuck, and that moment saved Mr. Parrett's life, and probably Fawcett's too. Mr. Parrett sprang back, dragging Fawcett with him. Scarcely was he out of the way when there was a great splash in the soft sand

at the edge of the pool in which he had been searching. This was immediately followed by a great splash in the pool itself. All this was the work of a few moments, though it has taken some time to tell.

Mr. Parrett saw that the large rock, which had just fallen, lay on the edge of the pool, and — could he believe his eyes? — two boys lay in the pool itself. One he immediately recognised as Polson, and the other, after a moment or two, he saw to be Snorty!

The other boys had now run up, and with great care they helped Mr. Parrett to lift the boys out of the pool of water. Snorty was quite unconscious, and had a great cut on his head, where it had evidently struck against the rock. Polson had fallen into the shallow pool, and that had somewhat broken the force of the fall, but he was lying in a twisted position, and though seemingly unconscious, he groaned as they moved him, and at a glance it was seen that his back was in some way injured, how seriously Mr. Parrett could not tell.

What had happened?

Snorty and Polson had, as quickly as they

could, rolled a rock to the edge of the cliff directly over Mr. Parrett. The rock they were rolling had stuck on another rock on the very edge of the precipitous incline. Polson was straining at it, when Snorty gave it a violent thrust with his foot. It suddenly moved and fell, and Polson, taken by surprise, had pitched forward too. As he fell he clutched at Snorty. Together they rolled down the short and steep incline and then fell sheer, thirty or forty feet on to the beach below.

Mr. Parrett immediately sent some of the boys to summon help, and meanwhile did all he could for the sufferers. After what seemed ages, but was really only half an hour, men arrived with hurdles, and with much difficulty got the two injured boys up the cliffs to the school. Soon after the school doctor, and a little later another doctor arrived.

They examined Snorty, as manifestly the most seriously injured, first. As the examination proceeded they looked very grave, and, after a short consultation, the school doctor turned to Dr. Taylor and said in a low tone, "This boy's case is hopeless; there is severe concussion of the brain, and he cannot

live very long. You had better send for his friends at once."

"I expect he has no friends besides Scragg, the man who committed the burglary here. This young fellow was his accomplice."

"Indeed! Well, we can do nothing for him; it is a question of hours only."

The two doctors turned to Polson, and, after a careful examination, they told Dr. Taylor that his spine was injured, and that the injury would very likely prove to be a permanent one.

No effort was spared for the two boys, but Snorty never recovered consciousness, and, in less than twelve hours, passed away, to appear before the Judge of all the earth. To that Judge those who watched his death had to leave him, a Judge infinitely just, infinitely loving, One Who knew all that could be said for poor Snorty, One Who had watched and yearned over him from the day when, in a miserable little London alley, he had been brought forth by a drunken mother, the wife of a drunken husband; Who had sorrowed as He had seen that little child grow up, surrounded by all that was evil and vile, cursed by the sin of our great city, taught as soon

as he could walk and speak to lie and steal and blaspheme ; Who had seen him deserted by father and mother, and left in the streets to earn his own bread in his own way, then taken up by a professional pick-pocket and burglar who beat and ill-used him, and taught him all the arts of his profession, and trained him to be wonderfully light of hand and foot ; Who had sent Scragg into his life, intending it to be a new opportunity and chance for each.

Scragg had partly risen to the responsibility; he had given to the boy the first affection he had enjoyed, had shielded him from the grosser vices and evils of city life, and had sent him to school. At school Snorty had for a time been inclined towards the right and true. But then Scragg had needed him in his unlawful trade, and he had put from him the higher appeals whilst loving his earthly master and serving him most faithfully.

The Judge before Whom he was so suddenly summoned knew all this and more, knew how far the responsibility for what he was rested upon him, and how far upon others, such as you and me, who have been brought up in such a different way, and who

have all some opportunities of helping such as he.

Snorty passed away, but Polson lingered on, and at last took the turn that led to partial restoration to health and strength. During his long illness he met with nothing but kindness from all with whom he came into contact. Mr. Parrett was amongst these, and by constant kindness and unvarying patience, backed up by private prayer, he was able at last completely to win Polson's confidence, although, try as he might, he could not lift the cloud of gloom which had fallen upon the boy's life and soul.

He, of course, told his mother all about Polson, and after much prayer and thought she had been moved to ask that as soon as Polson could be shifted, he might come to her for a few days. Polson had very few friends in England, and none of these made any objection to this arrangement; and he was only too glad to get anywhere for a change from the school hospital, well as he had been treated. So it came to pass that, when he was convalescent, he went to the little cottage in Kent where Mrs. Parrett was now living. Mr. Parrett took him down there

one Saturday, and stayed over till the Monday.

Mrs. Parrett was like a mother to the crippled boy, and on Sunday he was lying, white-faced and thin, on a couch in the pretty little drawing-room, when he said, "Mrs. Parrett, why are you and Mr. Parrett so kind to me? I have done you and yours nothing but harm, and yet you are like a mother to me."

"I am glad you think so, Peter, for that's what I want to be. I feel that God has laid it upon me not only to mother you, but also to bring some gladness and peace into your life."

"God does not care in that way about me, Mrs. Parrett. He is angry with me, and is punishing me, and will punish. You don't know all. I have not been able to tell any one yet, but must tell you. I fell down the cliffs in trying to roll a rock down upon your son. It was no accident, as at the inquest it was thought to be."

"I know; little Fawcett saw all, and we guessed what it meant. But don't let us talk of that now. It is all past, and I know you are very sorry for all."

"Sorry! It has been on my mind like a

load of lead, and yet I have not dared to tell any one. And yet you and Mr. Parrett have forgiven all ?"

"Yes, Peter ; yes, as we hope to be forgiven. We were both praying for you before this, and that fall from the cliffs was, I believe, God's way of answering our prayers and of stopping a very much worse fall."

"No, no, Mrs. Parrett. It was God's punishment only. He was angry with me, and is angry with me still, and ever will be angry with me. His hand will ever be heavy upon me. Oh, Mrs. Parrett, I shall never be able to walk again ; it is God's punishment."

"I know, my poor laddie, that you may always be a cripple," said Mrs. Parrett very gently, stroking his downcast head with soft motherly hand and with a touch in which was a benediction. "And, yes, God's hand *will* be on you, as mine is now, in love and sympathy. God is not angry with you. He does not send sorrow and pain to men in mere spite and wrath. He sends these things as His messengers to call men to Himself. He has wounded you that He may heal. He has crippled that He may make whole. Do you understand me ?"

"Yes," said Polson.

"As you look back, do you wish that He had allowed you to kill my son, or that He had taken you suddenly as He did that poor burglar boy?"

Polson shuddered and grew paler. "No, no! But it is hard to be a cripple all my life."

"It may not be all your life. But in any case it is better to be a cripple and walk with God than to be strong and straight and to walk without Him. God is calling you now to walk with Him. You can go to Him through Jesus, and together They will help and keep and bless you all your days."

By the evening of that quiet Sunday there was great happiness in that little cottage. The greatest change that can take place in any life had taken place in Polson's. Remorse, fear, and the awful gloom which had held possession of his heart ever since he had come to consciousness after his fall had now fled, and in their place were wonderful peace and gladness.

After some months he returned to the A.I. and I. Reynolds and Smythe had a discussion about him just before he came back.

"I say, Smythe, do you know that Cornflour is coming back to-morrow?"

"Yes, Parrett told me. They thought he had better go to another school now because it would be so hard for him to come back here. But he said he would rather come back and face the music. Jolly plucky, I think."

"Yes, real plucky. If I had been in his place I would rather have started afresh somewhere else. Then his back will always be reminding him and us of how he got it."

"Yes, he knows that, but he is not going to funk it. He got his governor specially to ask the Old Man to take him back. He is going to live the old days down, that's what Daivid said."

"Well, I say, we'll give him a leg up, poor chap. He must have some grit in him after all, and it will be a hard time for him just at first."

Accordingly Reynolds and Smythe began to pave the way for his arrival. They told others of his reasons for coming back, and dwelt upon his pluck in facing the music. They threatened all manner of terrible things to anyone who dared to allude, even in the most distant way, to his back or his crutch.

Accordingly when Polson on the next day hobbled into the schoolroom awkwardly and shamefacedly he found that his schoolfellows welcomed him back as though nothing had happened. Reynolds and Smythe were specially glad to see him, and everyone tried to make things as easy for him as possible.

One youngster, who forgot the warning he had received, sang out, with the thoughtless cruelty of a schoolboy, "Oh! I say, how jolly rummy old Cornflour looks with his——"

But he got no further. His remarks were promptly smothered, and he was taken out into a passage by Reynolds and Smythe, and dealt with in a suitable, though, to him, painful manner. His yells impressed the other small boys with the inadvisability of repeating his offence.

Polson had intended to say something of confession and regret publicly, but there was no need for it. The boys so clearly understood all, and just let him settle down amongst them again to a decent and respectable schoolboy life.

It was a long time before he got all right again, but the very fact of his being slightly

crippled helped him in the first months of his fight with his old self. It was not all easy for him to become straight and honest, but he fought his fight out doggedly and won, and once again the truth of the old saying was seen that "He that ruleth his spirit is better than he that taketh a city." He completely lived down his old bad name, and made a new one for himself that was savoury and clean.

Mrs. Stubbs continued to flourish for many years at the A.I. and I. with "hall her buckets and dustpans and brooms and brushes." We have only heard her in her wrath, let us listen to her for a moment as she talks to one of her cronies in peace and quietness.

"When that Mr. Parritt came to school with his nice noo straw hat and his pepper-and-salt trousis with the green and white ribbon, I saw by the look of 'is heye that 'e'd be the master of those little revels in the first form, I did. I said to my man, "*'E'll* tame they young sanviges, *'e'll* give 'em mustard,' and, Mrs. Gammidge, 'e just *did*. They'd led poor Mr. Punshie and Mr. Lamb sich a dance, up and down, up and down, just as though a will-o'-the-wisp was

after 'em; but when this Mr. Parritt came they just shut up like one of these yere opery 'ats that the gents sit on when they go to the theaytre, and yet, mind you, Mrs. Gammidge, they wushup the very hair he breathes. And as for 'im and that Powlson, who you know tried to rowl down a great rock on his poor 'ead, why, they're just as thick and thin as rubbers, and Parritt's making a real gent of him. Now when he sees my little hinnocent lamb enjoying a bit of a frisk in the King's 'ighway, 'e doesn't klip 'im on the ear and knock 'im into a puddle and spile his trousis, as was wunst his nasty 'abit. No, Mrs. Gammidge, 'e looks at 'im that smiling, for all the world like a pig in clover, and as often as not gives him a 'a-penny to warm the cocklies of 'is dear little 'eart, bless un! As I often says to my man, 'It's a long lane that 'as no silver lining.'"

There now remains but a word about Scragg.

Whilst he was in prison Mr. Parrett did all he could to look after his affairs, and when he was released he met him at the prison doors, persuaded him to come to his own home, and then did all he could to give him a fresh start in life.

Then Mrs. Parrett and her son never rested until they had won him for Christ. He became a real Christian man, lived decently and honestly, and at length, by honest toil, worked up a really fine market garden. Then his "girl," who all through had remained faithful to him, after her father's death, married him, and for many years they were very happy together.

But as Longfellow sings,

> "Wounds of the soul, though healed, will ache,
> The reddening scars remain, and make
> Confession;
> Lost innocence returns no more;
> We are not what we were before
> Transgression."

There was one wound in Scragg's soul which, though healed, often ached, one reddening scar that never entirely disappeared, and that was the memory of the little lad who had come into his life, and whom he might have tried to make honest and straight, but whom he had deliberately led into wrong again, and who, without time for confession or repentance, had been hurried before the Judge of all the earth.

There are some sins for which we can never in this world make reparation. God keep my boy readers from all such sins as these, and win them to Himself now, in the days of youth, before the evil days come, the evil days of sin and sinful habit.

THE END

The Mayflower Press, Plymouth, England. William Brendon & Son, Ltd